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"HE LOOKED AT HER LONG AND SADLY."

—*Casa Braccio, Part I.*

THE NOVELS OF
F. MARION CRAWFORD

In Twenty-five Volumes ✒ Authorized Edition

CASA BRACCIO

BY

F. MARION CRAWFORD

PART I

WITH FRONTISPIECE

P. F. COLLIER & SON
NEW YORK

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THIS STORY, BEING MY TWENTY-FIFTH NOVEL,
IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED TO
MY WIFE

SORRENTO, 1895

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CASA BRACCIO.

PART I.

SISTER MARIA ADDOLORATA.

CHAPTER I.

SUBIACO lies beyond Tivoli, southeast from Rome, at the upper end of a wild gorge in the Samnite mountains. It is an archbishopric, and gives a title to a cardinal, which alone would make it a town of importance. It shares with Monte Cassino the honour of having been chosen by Saint Benedict and Saint Scholastica, his sister, as the site of a monastery and a convent; and in a cell in the rock a portrait of the holy man is still well preserved, which is believed, not without reason, to have been painted from life, although Saint Benedict died early in the fifth century. The town itself rises abruptly to a great height upon a mass of rock, almost conical in shape, crowned by the cardinal's palace, and surrounded on three sides by

rugged mountains. On the third, it looks down the rapidly widening valley in the direction of Vicovaro, near which the Licenza runs into the Anio, in the neighbourhood of Horace's farm. It is a very ancient town, and in its general appearance it does not differ very much from many similar ones amongst the Italian mountains; but its position is exceptionally good, and its importance has been stamped upon it by the hands of those who have thought it worth holding since the days of ancient Rome. Of late it has, of course, acquired a certain modernness of aspect; it has planted acacia trees in its little piazza, and it has a gorgeously arrayed municipal band. But from a little distance one neither hears the band nor sees the trees, the grim mediæval fortifications frown upon the valley, and the time-stained dwellings, great and small, rise in rugged irregularity against the lighter brown of the rocky background and the green of scattered olive groves and chestnuts. Those features, at least, have not changed, and show no disposition to change during generations to come.

In the year 1844, modern civilization had not yet set in, and Subiaco was, within, what it still appears to be from without, a somewhat gloomy stronghold of the Middle Ages, rearing its battlements and towers in a shadowy gorge, above a mountain torrent, inhabited by primitive and pas-

sionate people, dominated by ecclesiastical institutions, and, though distinctly Roman, a couple of hundred years behind Rome itself in all matters ethic and æsthetic. It was still the scene of the Santacroce murder, which really decided Beatrice Cenci's fate; it was still the gathering place of highwaymen and outlaws, whose activity found an admirable field through all the region of hill and plain between the Samnite range and the sea, while the almost inaccessible fortresses of the higher mountains, towards Trevi and the Serra di Sant' Antonio, offered a safe refuge from the half-hearted pursuit of Pope Gregory's lazy soldiers.

Something of what one may call the life-and-death earnestness of earlier times, when passion was motive and prejudice was law, survived at that time and even much later; the ferocity of practical love and hatred dominated the theory and practice of justice in the public life of the smaller towns, while the patriarchal system subjected the family in almost absolute servitude to its head.

There was nothing very surprising in the fact that the head of the house of Braccio should have obliged one of his daughters to take the veil in the Convent of Carmelite nuns, just within the gate of Subiaco, as his sister had taken it many years earlier. Indeed, it was customary in the family of the Princes of Gerano that one of the women

should be a Carmelite, and it was a tradition not unattended with worldly advantages to the sisterhood, that the Braccio nun, whenever there was one, should be the abbess of that particular convent.

Maria Teresa Braccio had therefore yielded, though very unwillingly, to her father's insistence, and having passed through her novitiate, had finally taken the veil as a Carmelite of Subiaco, in the year 1841, on the distinct understanding that when her aunt died she was to be abbess in the elder lady's stead. The abbess herself was, indeed, in excellent health and not yet fifty years old, so that Maria Teresa — in religion Maria Addolorata — might have a long time to wait before she was promoted to an honour which she regarded as hereditary; but the prospect of such promotion was almost her only compensation for all she had left behind her, and she lived upon it and concentrated her character upon it, and practised the part she was to play, when she was quite sure that she was not observed.

Nature had not made her for a recluse, least of all for a nun of such a rigid Order as the Carmelites. The short taste of a brilliant social life which she had been allowed to enjoy, in accordance with an ancient tradition, before finally taking the veil, had shown her clearly enough the value of what she was to abandon, and at the same time

had altogether confirmed her father in his decision. Compared with the freedom of the present day, the restrictions imposed upon a young girl in the Roman society of those times were, of course, tyrannical in the extreme, and the average modern young lady would almost as willingly go into a convent as submit to them. But Maria Teresa had received an impression which nothing could efface. Her intuitive nature had divined the possible semi-emancipation of marriage, and her temperament had felt in a certain degree the extremes of joyous exaltation and of that entrancing sadness which is love's premonition, and which tells maidens what love is before they know him, by making them conscious of the breadth and depth of his yet vacant dwelling.

She had learned in that brief time that she was beautiful, and she had felt that she could love and that she should be loved in return. She had seen the world as a princess and had felt it as a woman, and she had understood all that she must give up in taking the veil. But she had been offered no choice, and though she had contemplated opposition, she had not dared to revolt. Being absolutely in the power of her parents, so far as she was aware, she had accepted the fatality of their will, and bent her fair head to be shorn of its glory and her broad forehead to be covered forever from the gaze of men. And having submitted, she had gone

through it all bravely and proudly, as perhaps she would have gone through other things, even to death itself, being a daughter of an old race, accustomed to deify honour and to make its divinities of tradition. For the rest of her natural life she was to live on the memories of one short, magnificent year, forever to be contented with the grim rigidity of conventual life in an ancient cloister surrounded by gloomy mountains. She was to be a veiled shadow amongst veiled shades, a priestess of sorrow amongst sad virgins; and though, if she lived long enough, she was to be the chief of them and their ruler, her very superiority could only make her desolation more complete, until her own shadow, like the others, should be gathered into eternal darkness.

Sister Maria Addolorata had certain privileges for which her companions would have given much, but which were traditionally the right of such ladies of the Braccio family as took the veil. For instance, she had a cell which, though not larger than the other cells, was better situated, for it had a little balcony looking over the convent garden, and high enough to afford a view of the distant valley and of the hills which bounded it, beyond the garden wall. It was entered by the last door in the corridor within, and was near the abbess's apartment, which was entered from the corridor, through a small antechamber which also gave

access to the vast linen-presses. The balcony, too, had a little staircase leading down into the garden. It had always been the custom to carry the linen to and from the laundry through Maria Addolorata's cell, and through a postern gate in the garden wall, the washing being done in the town. By this plan, the annoyance was avoided of carrying the huge baskets through the whole length of the convent, to and from the main entrance, which was also much further removed from the house of Sora Nanna, the chief laundress. Moreover, Maria Addolorata had charge of all the convent linen, and the employment thus afforded her was an undoubted privilege in itself, for occupation of any kind not devotional was excessively scarce in such an existence.

In the eyes of the other nuns, the constant society of the abbess herself was also a privilege, and one not by any means to be despised. After all, the abbess and her niece were nearly related, they could talk of the affairs of their family, and the abbess doubtless received many letters from Rome containing all the interesting news of the day, and all the social gossip — perfectly innocent, of course — which was the chronicle of Roman life. These were valuable compensations, and the nuns envied them. The abbess, too, saw her brother, the archbishop and titular cardinal of Subiaco, when the princely prelate came out from

Rome for the coolness of the mountains in August and September, and his conversation was said to be not only edifying, but fascinating. The cardinal was a very good man, like many of the Braccio family, but he was also a man of the world, who had been sent upon foreign missions of importance, and had acquired some worldly fame as well as much ecclesiastical dignity in the course of his long life. It must be delightful, the nuns thought, to be his own sister, to receive long visits from him, and to hear all he had to say about the busy world of Rome. To most of them, everything beyond Rome was outer darkness.

But though the nuns envied the abbess and Maria Addolorata, they did not venture to say so, and they hardly dared to think so, even when they were all alone, each in her cell; for the concentration of conventual life magnifies small spiritual sins in the absence of anything really sinful, and to admit that she even faintly wishes she might be some one else is to tarnish the brightness of the nun's scrupulously polished conscience. It would be as great a misdeed, perhaps, as to allow the attention to wander to worldly matters during times of especial devotion. Nevertheless, the envy showed itself, very perceptibly and much against the will of the sisters themselves, in a certain cold deference of manner towards the young and beautiful nun who was one day to be the superior of

them all by force of circumstances for which she deserved no credit. She had the position among them, and something of the isolation, of a young royal princess amongst the ladies of her queen mother's court.

There was about her, too, an undefinable something, like the shadow of future fate, a something almost impossible to describe, and yet distinctly appreciable to all who saw her and lived with her. It came upon her especially when she was silent and abstracted, when she was kneeling in her place in the choir, or was alone upon her little balcony over the garden. At such times a luminous pallor gradually took the place of her fresh and healthy complexion, her eyes grew unnaturally dark, with a deep, fixed fire in them, and the regular features took upon them the white, set straightness of a death mask. Sometimes, at such moments, a shiver ran through her, even in summer, and she drew her breath sharply once or twice, as though she were hurt. The expression was not one of suffering or pain, but was rather that of a person conscious of some great danger which must be met without fear or flinching.

She would have found it very hard to explain what she felt just then. She might have said that it was a consciousness of something unknown. She could not have said more than that. It brought no vision with it, beatific or horrifying;

it was not the consequence of methodical contemplation, as the trance state is; and it was followed by no reaction nor sense of uneasiness. It simply came and went as the dark shadow of a thunder-cloud passing between her and the sun, and leaving no trace behind.

There was nothing to account for it, unless it could be explained by heredity, and no one had ever suggested any such explanation to Maria. It was true that there had been more than one tragedy in the Braccio family since they had first lifted their heads above the level of their contemporaries to become Roman Barons, in the old days before such titles as prince and duke had come into use. But then, most of the old families could tell of deeds as cruel and lives as passionate as any remembered by Maria's race, and Italians, though superstitious in unexpected ways, have little of that belief in hereditary fate which is common enough in the gloomy north.

"Was Sister Maria Addolorata a great sinner, before she became a nun?" asked Annetta, Sora Nanna's daughter, of her mother, one day, as they came away from the convent.

"What are you saying!" exclaimed the washerwoman, in a tone of rebuke. "She is a great lady, and the niece of the abbess and of the cardinal. Sometimes certain ideas pass through your head, my daughter!"

And Sora Nanna gesticulated, unable to express herself.

"Then she sins in her throat," observed Annetta, calmly. "But you do not even look at her — so many sheets — so many pillow-cases — and good day! But while you count, I look."

"Why should I look at her?" inquired Nanna, shifting the big empty basket she carried on her head, hitching her broad shoulders and wrinkling her leathery forehead, as her small eyes turned upward. "Do you take me for a man, that I should make eyes at a nun?"

"And I? Am I a man? And yet I look at her. I see nothing but her face when we are there, and afterwards I think about it. What harm is there? She sins in her throat. I know it."

Sora Nanna hitched her shoulders impatiently again, and said nothing. The two women descended through the steep and narrow street, slippery and wet with slimy, coal black mud that glittered on the rough cobble-stones. Nanna walked first, and Annetta followed close behind her, keeping step, and setting her feet exactly where her mother had trod, with the instinctive certainty of the born mountaineer. With heads erect and shoulders square, each with one hand on her hip and the other hanging down, they carried their burdens swiftly and safely, with a swinging,

undulating gait as though it were a pleasure to them to move, and would require an effort to stop rather than to walk on forever. They wore shoes because they were well-to-do people, and chose to show that they were when they went up to the convent. But for the rest they were clad in the costume of the neighbourhood, — the coarse white shift, close at the throat, the scarlet bodice, the short, dark, gathered skirt, and the dark blue carpet apron, with flowers woven on a white stripe across the lower end. Both wore heavy gold earrings, and Sora Nanna had eight or ten strings of large coral beads around her throat.

Annetta was barely fifteen years old, brown, slim, and active as a lizard. She was one of those utterly unruly and untamable girls of whom there are two or three in every Italian village, in mountain or plain, a creature in whom a living consciousness of living nature took the place of thought, and with whom to be conscious was to speak, without reason or hesitation. The small, keen, black eyes were set under immense and arched black eyebrows which made the eyes themselves seem larger than they were, and the projecting temples cast shadows to the cheek which hid the rudimentary modelling of the coarse lower lids. The ears were flat and ill-developed, but close to the head and not large; the teeth very short, though perfectly regular and exceedingly white; the lips long, mo-

bile, brown rather than red, and generally parted like those of a wild animal. The girl's smoothly sinewy throat moved with every step, showing the quick play of the elastic cords and muscles. Her blue-black hair was plaited, though far from neatly, and the braids were twisted into an irregular flat coil, generally hidden by the flap of the white embroidered cloth cross-folded upon her head and hanging down behind.

For some minutes the mother and daughter continued to pick their way down the winding lanes between the dark houses of the upper village. Then Sora Nanna put out her right hand as a signal to Annetta that she meant to stop, and she stood still on the steep descent and turned deliberately till she could see the girl.

"What are you saying?" she began, as though there had been no pause in the conversation. "That Sister Maria Addolorata sins in her throat! But how can she sin in her throat, since she sees no man but the gardener and the priest? Indeed, you say foolish things!"

"And what has that to do with it?" inquired Annetta. "She must have seen enough of men in Rome, every one of them a great lord. And who tells you that she did not love one of them and does not wish that she were married to him? And if that is not a sin in the throat, I do not know what to say. There is my answer."

"You say foolish things," repeated Sora Nanna. Then she turned deliberately away and began to descend once more, with an occasional dissatisfied movement of the shoulders.

"For the rest," observed Annetta, "it is not my business. I would rather look at the Englishman when he is eating meat than at Sister Maria when she is counting clothes! I do not know whether he is a wolf or a man."

"Eh! The Englishman!" exclaimed Sora Nanna. "You will look so much at the Englishman that you will make blood with Gigetto, who wishes you well, and when Gigetto has waited for the Englishman at the corner of the forest, what shall we all have? The galleys. What do you see in the Englishman? He has red hair and long, long teeth. Yes — just like a wolf. You are right. And if he pays for meat, why should he not eat it? If he did not pay, it would be different. It would soon be finished. Heaven send us a little money without any Englishman! Besides, Gigetto said the other day that he would wait for him at the corner of the forest. And Gigetto, when he says a thing, he does it."

"And why should we go to the galleys if Gigetto waits for the Englishman?" inquired Annetta.

"Silly!" cried the older woman. "Because Gigetto would take your father's gun, since he has none of his own. That would be enough. We should have done it!"

Annetta shrugged her shoulders and said nothing.

"But take care," continued Sora Nanna. "Your father sleeps with one eye open. He sees you, and he sees also the Englishman every day. He says nothing, because he is good. But he has a fist like a paving-stone. I tell you nothing more."

They reached Sora Nanna's house and disappeared under the dark archway. For Sora Nanna and Stefanone, her husband, were rich people for their station, and their house was large and was built with an arch wide enough and high enough for a loaded beast of burden to pass through with a man on its back. And, within, everything was clean and well kept, excepting all that belonged to Annetta. There were airy upper rooms, with well-swept floors of red brick or of beaten cement, furnished with high beds on iron trestles, and wooden stools of well-worn brown oak, and tables painted a vivid green, and primitive lithographs of Saint Benedict and Santa Scholastica and the Addolorata. And there were lofts in which the rich autumn grapes were hung up to dry on strings, and where chestnuts lay in heaps, and figs were spread in symmetrical order on great sheets of the coarse grey paper made in Subiaco. There were apples, too, though poor ones, and there were bins of maize and wheat, waiting to be picked over before being ground in the primeval household mill. And there were hams and sides of bacon, and red peppers, and

bundles of dried herbs, and great mountain cheeses on shelves. There was also a guest room, better than the rest, which Stefanone and his wife occasionally let to respectable travellers or to the merchants who came from Rome on business to stay a few days in Subiaco. At the present time the room was rented by the Englishman concerning whom the discussion had arisen between Annetta and her mother.

Angus Dalrymple, M.D., was not an Englishman, as he had tried to explain to Sora Nanna, though without the least success. He was, as his name proclaimed, a Scotchman of the Scotch, and a doctor of medicine. It was true that he had red hair, and an abundance of it, and long white teeth, but Sora Nanna's description was otherwise libellously incomplete and wholly omitted all mention of the good points in his appearance. In the first place, he possessed the characteristic national build in a superior degree of development, with all the lean, bony energy which has done so much hard work in the world. He was broad-shouldered, long-armed, long-legged, deep-chested, and straight, with sinewy hands and singularly well-shaped fingers. His healthy skin had that mottled look produced by countless freckles upon an almost childlike complexion. The large, grave mouth generally concealed the long teeth objected to by Sora Nanna, and the lips, though even and narrow,

were strong rather than thin, and their rare smile was both genial and gentle. There were lines — as yet very faint — about the corners of the mouth, which told of a nervous and passionate disposition and of the strong Scotch temper, as well as of a certain sensitiveness which belongs especially to northern races. The pale but very bright blue eyes under shaggy auburn brows were fiery with courage and keen with shrewd enterprise. Dalrymple was assuredly not a man to be despised under any circumstances, intellectually or physically.

His presence in such a place as Subiaco, at a time when hardly any foreigners except painters visited the place, requires some explanation; for he was not an artist, but a doctor, and had never been even tempted to amuse himself with sketching. In the first place, he was a younger son of a good family, and received a moderate allowance, quite sufficient in those days to allow him considerable latitude of expenditure in old-fashioned Italy. Secondly, he had entirely refused to follow any of the professions known as 'liberal.' He had no taste for the law, and he had not the companionable character which alone can make life in the army pleasant in time of peace. His beliefs, or his lack of belief, together with an honourable conscience, made him naturally opposed to all churches. On the other hand, he had been attracted almost from his childhood by scientific

subjects, at a period when the discoveries of the last fifty years appeared as misty but beatific visions to men of science. To the disappointment and, to some extent, to the humiliation of his family, he insisted upon studying medicine, at the University of St. Andrew's, as soon as he had obtained his ordinary degree at Cambridge. And having once insisted, nothing could turn him from his purpose, for he possessed English tenacity grafted upon Scotch originality, with a good deal of the strength of both races.

While still a student he had once made a tour in Italy, and like many northerners had fallen under the mysterious spell of the South from the very first. Having a sufficient allowance for all his needs, as has been said, and being attracted by the purely scientific side of his profession rather than by any desire to become a successful practitioner, it was natural enough that on finding himself free to go whither he pleased in pursuit of knowledge, he should have visited Italy again. A third visit had convinced him that he should do well to spend some years in the country; for by that time he had become deeply interested in the study of malarious fevers, which in those days were completely misunderstood. It would be far too much to say that young Dalrymple had at that time formed any complete theory in regard to malaria; but his naturally lonely and concentrated

intellect had contemptuously discarded all explanations of malarious phenomena, and, communicating his own ideas to no one, until he should be in possession of proofs for his opinions, he had in reality got hold of the beginning of the truth about germs which has since then revolutionized medicine.

The only object of this short digression has been to show that Angus Dalrymple was not a careless idler and tourist in Italy, only half responsible for what he did, and not at all for what he thought. On the contrary, he was a man of very unusual gifts, of superior education, and of rare enterprise; a strong, silent, thoughtful man, about eight-and-twenty years of age, and just beginning to feel his power as something greater than he had suspected, when he came to spend the autumn months in Subiaco, and hired Sora Nanna's guest room, with a little room leading off it, which he kept locked, and in which he had a table, a chair, a microscope, some books, a few chemicals and some simple apparatus.

His presence had at first roused certain jealous misgivings in the heart of the town physician, Sor Tommaso Taddei, commonly spoken of simply as 'the Doctor,' because there was no other. But Dalrymple was not without tact and knowledge of human nature. He explained that he came as a foreigner to learn from native physicians how

malarious fevers were treated in Italy; and he listened with patient intelligence to Sor Tommaso's antiquated theories, and silently watched his still more antiquated practice. And Sor Tommaso, like all people who think that they know a vast deal, highly approved of Dalrymple's submissive silence, and said that the young man was a marvel of modesty, and that if he could stay about ten years in Subiaco and learn something from Sor Tommaso himself, he might really some day be a fairly good doctor, — which were extraordinarily liberal admissions on the part of the old practitioner, and contributed largely towards reassuring Stefanone concerning his lodger's character.

For Stefanone and his wife had their doubts and suspicions. Of course they knew that all foreigners except Frenchmen and Austrians were Protestants, and ate meat on fast days, and were under the most especial protection of the devil, who fattened them in this world that they might burn the better in the next. But Stefanone had never seen the real foreigner at close quarters, and had not conceived it possible that any living human being could devour so much half-cooked flesh in a day as Dalrymple desired for his daily portion, paid for, and consumed. Moreover, there was no man in Subiaco who could and did swallow such portentous draughts of the strong mountain wine, without suffering any ap-

parent effects from his potations. Furthermore, also, Dalrymple did strange things by day and night in the small laboratory he had arranged next to his bedroom, and unholy and evil smells issued at times through the cracks of the door, and penetrated from the bedroom to the stairs outside, and were distinctly perceptible all over the house. Therefore Stefanone maintained for a long time that his lodger was in league with the powers of darkness, and that it was not safe to keep him in the house, though he paid his bill so very regularly, every Saturday, and never quarrelled about the price of his food and drink. On the whole, however, Stefanone abstained from interfering, as he had at first been inclined to do, and entering the laboratory, with the support of the parish priest, a basin of holy water, and a loaded gun — all three of which he considered necessary for an exorcism; and little by little, Sor Tommaso, the doctor, persuaded him that Dalrymple was a worthy young man, deeply engaged in profound studies, and should be respected rather than exorcised.

"Of course," admitted the doctor, "he is a Protestant. But then he has a passport. Let us therefore let him alone."

The existence of the passport — indispensable in those days — was a strong argument in the eyes of the simple Stefanone. He could not con-

ceive that a magician whose soul was sold to the devil could possibly have a passport and be under the protection of the law. So the matter was settled.

CHAPTER II.

Sister Maria Addolorata sat by the open door of her cell, looking across the stone parapet of her little balcony, and watching the changing richness of the western sky, as the sun went down far out of sight behind the mountains. Though the month was October, the afternoon was warm; it was very still, and the air had been close in the choir during the Benediction service, which was just over. She leaned back in her chair, and her lips parted as she breathed, with a perceptible desire for refreshment in the breath. She held a piece of needlework in her heavy white hands; the needle had been thrust through the linen, but the stitch had remained unfinished, and one pointed finger pressed the doubled edge against the other, lest the material should slip before she made up her mind to draw the needle through. Deep in the garden under the balcony the late flowers were taking strangely vivid colours out of the bright sky above, and some bits of broken glass, stuck in the mortar on the top of the opposite wall as a protection against thieving boys, glowed like a line of rough rubies against the misty distance. Even the white

walls of the bare cell and the coarse grey blanket lying across the foot of the small bed drank in a little of the colour, and looked less grey and less grim.

From the eaves, high above the open door, the swallows shot down into the golden light, striking great circles and reflecting the red gold of the sky from their breasts as they wheeled just beyond the wall, with steady wings wide-stretched, up and down; and each one, turning at full speed, struck upwards again and was out of sight in an instant, above the lintel. The nun watched them, her eyes trying to follow each of them in turn and to recognize them separately as they flashed into sight again and again.

Her lips were parted, and as she sat there she began to sing very softly and quite unconsciously. She could not have told what the song was. The words were strange and oddly divided, and there was a deadly sadness in a certain interval that came back almost with every stave. But the voice itself was beautiful beyond all comparison with ordinary voices, full of deep and touching vibrations and far harmonics, though she sang so softly, all to herself. Notes like hers haunt the ears — and sometimes the heart — when she who sang them has been long dead, and many would give much to hear but a breath of them again.

It was hard for Maria Addolorata not to sing

sometimes, when she was all alone in her cell, though it was so strictly forbidden. Singing is a gift of expression, when it is a really natural gift, as much as speech and gesture and the smile on the lips, with the one difference that it is a keener pleasure to him or her that sings than gesture or speech can possibly be. Music, and especially singing, are a physical as well as an intellectual expression, a pleasure of the body as well as a 'delectation' of the soul. To sing naturally and spontaneously is most generally an endowment of natures physically strong and rich by the senses, independently of the mind, though melody may sometimes be the audible translation of a silent thought as well as the unconscious speech of wordless passion.

And in Maria's song there was a strain of that something unknown and fatal, which the nuns sometimes saw in her face and which was in her eyes now, as she sang; for they no longer followed the circling of the swallows, but grew fixed and dark, with fiery reflexions from the sunset sky, and the regular features grew white and straight and square against the deepening shadows within the narrow room. The deep voice trembled a little, and the shoulders had a short, shivering movement under the heavy folds of the dark veil, as the sensation of a presence ran through her and made her shudder. But the voice did not break,

and she sang on, louder, now, than she realized, the full notes swelling in her throat, and vibrating between the narrow walls, and floating out through the open door to join the flight of the swallows

The door of the cell opened gently, but she did not hear, and sang on, leaning back in her chair and gazing still at the pink clouds above the mountains.

"Death is my love, dark-eyed death—"

she sang.

"Maria!"

The abbess was standing in the doorway and speaking to her, but she did not hear.

"His hands are sweetly cold and gentle—
Flowers of leek, and firefly—
Holy Saint John!"

"Maria!" cried the abbess, impatiently. "What follies are you singing? I could hear you in my room!"

Maria Addolorata started and rose from her seat, still holding her needlework, and turning half round towards her superior, with suddenly downcast eyes. The elder lady came forward with slow dignity and walked as far as the door of the balcony, where she stood still for a moment, gazing at the beautiful sky. She was not a stately woman, for she was too short and stout, but she had that calm air of assured superiority which takes the

place of stateliness, and which seems to belong especially to those who occupy important positions in the Church. Her large features, though too heavy, were imposing in their excessive pallor, while the broad, dark brown shadows all around and beneath the large black eyes gave the face a depth of expression which did not, perhaps, wholly correspond with the original character. It was a striking face, and considering the wide interval between the ages of the abbess and her niece, and the natural difference of colouring, there was a strong family resemblance in the two women.

The abbess sat down upon the only chair, and Maria remained standing before her, her sewing in her hands.

"I have often told you that you must not sing in your cell," said the abbess, in a coldly severe tone.

Maria's shoulders shook her veil a little, but she still looked at the floor.

"I cannot help it," she answered in a constrained voice. "I did not know that I was singing —"

"That is ridiculous! How can one sing, and not know it? You are not deaf. At least, you do not sing as though you were. I will not have it. I could hear you as far away as my own room — a love-song, too!"

"The love of death," suggested Maria.

"It makes no difference," answered the elder

lady. "You disturb the peace of the sisters with your singing. You know the rule, and you must obey it, like the rest. If you must sing, then sing in church."

"I do."

"Very well, that ought to be enough. Must you sing all the time? Suppose that the Cardinal had been visiting me, as was quite possible, what impression would he have had of our discipline?"

"Oh, Uncle Cardinal has often heard me sing."

"You must not call him 'Uncle Cardinal.' It is like the common people who say 'Uncle Priest.' I have told you that a hundred times at least. And if the Cardinal has heard you singing, so much the worse."

"He once told me that I had a good voice," observed Maria, still standing before her aunt.

"A good voice is a gift of God and to be used in church, but not in such a way as to attract attention or admiration. The devil is everywhere, my daughter, and makes use of our best gifts as a means of temptation. The Cardinal certainly did not hear you singing that witch's love-song which I heard just now. He would have rebuked you as I do."

"It was not a love-song. It is about death — and Saint John's eve."

"Well, then it is about witches. Do not argue with me. There is a rule, and you must not break it."

Maria Addolorata said nothing, but moved a step and leaned against the door-post, looking out into the evening light. The stout abbess sat motionless in her straight chair, looking past her niece at the distant hills. She had evidently said all she meant to say about the singing, and it did not occur to her to talk of anything else. A long silence followed. Maria was not timid, but she had been accustomed from her childhood to look upon her aunt as an immensely superior person, moving in a higher sphere, and five years spent in the convent as novice and nun had rather increased than diminished the feeling of awe which the abbess inspired in the young girl. There was, indeed, no other sister in the community who would have dared to answer the abbess's rebuke at all, and Maria's very humble protest really represented an extraordinary degree of individuality and courage. Conventual institutions can only exist on a basis of absolute submission.

The abbess was neither harsh nor unkind, and was certainly not a very terrifying figure, but she possessed undeniable force of character, strengthened by the inborn sense of hereditary right and power, and her kindness was as imposing as her displeasure was lofty and solemn. She had very little sympathy for any weakness in others, but she was always ready to dispense the mercy of Heaven, vicariously, so to say, and with a certain

royally suppressed surprise that Heaven should be merciful. On the whole, considering the circumstances, she admitted that Maria Addolorata had accepted the veil with sufficient outward grace, though without any vocation, and she took it for granted that with such opportunities the girl must slowly develop into an abbess not unlike her predecessors. She prayed regularly, of course, and with especial intention, for her niece, as for the welfare of the order, and assumed as an unquestionable result that her prayers were answered with perfect regularity, since her own conscience did not reproach her with negligence of her young relative's spiritual education.

To the abbess, religion, the order and its duties, presented themselves as a vast machine controlled for the glory of God by the Pope. She and her nuns were parts of the great engine which must work with perfect regularity in order that God might be glorified. Her mind was naturally religious, but was at the same time essentially of the material order. There is a material imagination, and there is a spiritual imagination. There are very good and devout men and women who take the world, present and to come, quite literally, as a mere fulfilment of their own limitations; who look upon what they know as being all that need be known, and upon what they believe of God and Heaven as the mechanical consequence of what

they know rather than as the cause and goal, respectively, of existence and action; to whom the letter of the law is the arbitrary expression of a despotic power, which, somehow, must be looked upon as merciful; who answer all questions concerning God's logic with the tremendous assertion of God's will; whose God is a magnified man, and whose devil is a malignant animal, second only to God in understanding, while extreme from God in disposition. There are good men and women who, to use a natural but not flippant simile, take it for granted that the soul is cast into the troubled waters of life without the power to swim, or even the possibility of learning to float, dependent upon the bare chance that some one may throw it the life-buoy of ritual religion as its only conceivable means of salvation. And the opponents of each particular form of faith invariably take just such good men and women, with all their limitations, as the only true exponents of that especial creed, which they then proceed to tear in pieces with all the ease such an undue advantage of false premise gives them. None of them have thought of intellectual mercy as being, perhaps, an integral part of Christian charity. Faith they have in abundance, and hope also not a little; but charity, though it be for men's earthly ills and, theoretically, if not always practically, for men's spiritual shortcomings, is rigidly forbidden for the errors of men's

minds. Why? No thinking man can help asking the little question which grows great in the unanswering silence that follows it.

All this is not intended as an apology for what the young nun, Maria Addolorata, afterwards did, though much of it is necessary in explanation of her deeds, which, however they may be regarded, brought upon her and others their inevitable logical consequences. Still less is it meant, in any sense, as an attack upon the conventual system of the cloistered orders, which system was itself a consequence of spiritual, intellectual and political history, and has a prime right to be judged upon the evidence of its causes, and not by the shortcomings of its results in changed times. What has been said merely makes clear the fact that the characters, minds, and dispositions of Maria Addolorata and of her aunt, the abbess, were wholly unsuited to one another. And this one fact became a source of life and death, of happiness and misery, of comedy and tragedy, to many individuals, even to the present day.

The nun remained motionless, pressing her cheek against the door-post and looking out. Her aunt had not quite shut the door by which she had entered, and a cool stream of air blew outward from the corridor and through the cell, bringing with it that peculiar odour which belongs to all large and old buildings inhabited by religious communities.

It is made up of the cold exhalations from stone walls and paved floors in which there is always some dampness, of the acrid smell of the heavy, leathern, wadded curtains which shut off the main drafts of air, as the swinging doors do in a mine, of a faint but perceptible suggestion of incense which penetrates the whole building from the church or the chapel, and, not least, of the fumes from the cookery of the great quantities of vegetables which are the staple food of the brethren or the sisters. It is as imperceptible to the monks and nuns themselves as the smell of tobacco to the smoker.

It had been very close in the little cell, and Maria was glad of the coolness that came in through the open door. Her eyes were fixed on the sky with a longing look. Again the words of her song rose to her lips, but she checked them, remembering her aunt's presence, and with the effort to be silent came the strong wish to be free, to be over there upon those purple hills at evening, to look beyond and watch the sun sinking into the distant sea, to breathe her fill of the mountain air, to run along the crests of the hills till she should be tired, to sleep under the open sky, to see, in dreams, to-morrow's sun rising through the trees, to be waked by the song of birds and to find that the dream was true.

Instead of that, and instead of all it meant to

her, there was to be the silent evening meal, the close, lighted chapel, the wearily nasal chant of the sisters, her lonely cell, with its close darkness, the unrefreshing sleep, broken by the bell calling her to another office in the chapel; then, at last, the dawn, and the day that would seem as much a prisoner as herself within the convent walls, and the praying and nasal chanting, and the counting of sheets and pillow-cases, and doing a little sewing, and singing to herself, perhaps, and then the being reproved for it — the whole varied by meals of coarse food, and periodical stations in her seat in the choir. The day! The very sun seemed imprisoned in his corner of the garden wall, dragging slowly at his chain, in a short half-circle, from morning till evening, like a watch-dog tied up in a yard beside his kennel. The night was better. Sometimes she could see the moon-rays through the cracks of the balcony door, as she lay in her bed. She could see them against the darkness, and the ends of them were straight white lines and round white spots on the floor and on the walls. Her thoughts played in them, and her maiden fancies caught them and followed them lightly out into the white night and far away to the third world, which is dreamland. And in her dreams she sang to the midnight stars, and clasped her bare arms round the moon's white throat, kissing the moon-lady's pale and passionate

cheek, till she lost herself in the mysterious eyes, and found herself once more, bathed in cool star-showers, the queen of a tender dream.

There sat the abbess, in the only chair, stolid, righteous, imposing. The incarnation and representative of the ninety and nine who need no forgiveness, exasperatingly and mathematically virtuous as a dogma, a woman against whom no sort of reproach could be brought, and at the mere sight of whom false witnesses would shrivel up and die, like jelly-fish in the sun. She not only approved of the convent life, but she liked it. She was at liberty to do a thousand things which were not permitted to the nuns, but she had not the slightest inclination to do any of them, any more than she was inclined to admit that any of them could possibly be unhappy if they would only pray, sing, sleep, and eat boiled cabbage at the appointed hours. What had she in common with Maria Addolorata, except that she was born a princess and a Braccio?

Of what use was it to be a princess by birth, like a dozen or more of the sisters, or even a noble, like all the others? Of what use or advantage could anything be, where liberty was not? An even plainer and more desperate question rose in the young nun's heart, as she leaned her cheek against the door-post, still warm with the afternoon sun. Of what use was life, if it was to be lived

in the tomb with the accompaniment of a life-long funeral service? Why should not God be as well pleased with suicide as with self-burial? Why should not death all at once, by the sudden dash of cleanly steel, be as noble and acceptable a sacrifice as death by sordid degrees of orderly suffering, systematic starvation, and rigidly regulated misery? Was not life, life — and blood, blood — whether drawn by drops, or shed from a quick wound in the splendid redness of one heroic instant? Surely it would be as grand a thing, if a mere sacrifice were the object, to be laid down stark dead, with the death-thrust in the heart, at the foot of the altar, in all her radiant youth and full young beauty, untempted and unsullied, as to fast and pray through forty querulous years of misery in prison.

But then, there was the virtue of patience. Therein, doubtless, lay the difference. It was not the death alone that was to please God, but the long manner of it, the summed-up account of suffering, the interest paid on the capital of life after it was invested in death. God was to be pleased with items, and the sum of them. Item, a sleepless night. Item, a bad cold, caught by kneeling on the damp stones. Item, a dish of sweets refused on a feast-day. Item, the resolution not to laugh when a fly settled on the abbess's nose. Item, the resolution not to wish that her hair had never been

cut off. Item, being stifled in summer and frozen in winter, in her cell. Item, appreciating that it was the best cell, and that she was better off than the other sisters.

Repeat the items for half a century, sum them up, and offer them to God as a meet and fitting sacrifice — the destruction, by fine degrees of petty suffering, of one woman's whole life, almost from the beginning, and quite to the end, with the total annihilation of all its human possibilities, of love, of motherhood, of reasonable enjoyment and legitimate happiness. That was the formula for salvation which Maria Addolorata had received with the veil.

And not only had she received it. It had been thrust upon her, because she chanced to be the only available daughter of the ancient house of Braccio, to fill the hereditary seat beneath the wooden canopy, as abbess of the Subiaco Carmelites. If there had been another sister, less fair, more religiously disposed, that sister would have been chosen in Maria's stead. But there was no other; and there must be a young Braccio nun, to take the place of the elder one, when the latter should have filled her account to overflowing with little items to be paid for with the gold of certain salvation.

That a sinful woman, full of sorrows, and weary of the world, might silently bow her head under

the nun's veil, and wear out with prayerful austerity the deep-cut letters of her sin's story, that, at least, was a thing Maria could understand. There were faces amongst the sisters that haunted her in her solitude, lips that could have told much, but which said only 'Miserere'; eyes that had looked on love, and that fixed themselves now only on the Cross; cheeks blanched with grief and hollowed as the marble of an ancient fountain by often flowing tears; hearts that had given all, and had been beaten and bruised and rejected. The convent was for them; the life was a life for them; for them there was no freedom beyond these walls, in the living world, nor anywhere on this side of death. They had done right in coming, and they did right in staying; they were reasonable when they prayed that they might have time, before they died, to be sorry for their sins and to touch again the hem of the garment of innocence.

But even they, if they were told that it would be right, would they not rather shorten their time to a day, even to one instant, of aggregated pain, and offer up their sacrifice all at once? And why should it not be right? Did God delight in pain and suffering for its own sake? The passionate girl's heart revolted angrily against a Being that could enjoy the sufferings of helpless creatures.

But then, there was that virtue of patience

again, which was beyond her comprehension. At last she spoke, her face still to the sunset.

"What difference can it make to God how we die?" she asked, scarcely conscious that she was speaking.

The abbess must have started a little, for the chair creaked suddenly, several seconds before she answered. Her face did not relax, however, nor were her hands unclasped from one another as they lay folded on her knees.

"That is a foolish question, my daughter," she said at last. "Do you think that God was not pleased by the sufferings of the holy martyrs, and did not reward them for what they bore?"

"No, I did not mean that," answered Maria, quickly. "But why should we not all be martyrs? It would be much quicker."

"Heaven preserve us!" exclaimed the abbess. "What are you thinking of, child?"

"It would be so much quicker," repeated Maria. "What are we here for? To sacrifice our lives to God. We wish to make this sacrifice, and God promises to accept it. Why would it be less complete if we were led to the altar as soon as we have finished our novitiate and quickly killed? It would be the same, and it would be much quicker. What difference can it make how we die, since we are to die in the end, without accomplishing anything except dying?"

By this time the abbess's pale hands were unclasped, and one of them pressed each knee, as she leaned far forward in her seat, with an expression of surprise and horror, her dark lips parted and all the lines of her colourless face drawn down.

"Are you mad, Maria?" she asked in a low voice.

"Mad? No. Why should you think me mad?" The nun turned and looked down at her aunt. "After all, it is the great question. Our lives are but a preparation for death. Why need the preparation be so long? Why should the death be so slow? Why should it be right to kill ourselves for the glory of God by degrees, and wrong to do it all at once, if one has the courage? I think it is a very reasonable question."

"Indeed, you are beside yourself! The devil suggests such things to you and blinds you to the truth, my child. Penance and prayer, prayer and penance — by the grace of Heaven it will pass."

"Penance and prayer!" exclaimed Maria, sadly. "That is it — a slow death, but a sure one!"

"I am more than sixty years old," replied the abbess. "I have done penance and prayed prayers all my life, and you see — I am well. I am stout."

"For charity's sake, do not say so!" cried Maria, making the sign of the horns with her fingers, to ward off the evil eye. "You will certainly fall ill."

"Our lives are of God. It is our own eyes that are evil. You must not make horns with your fingers. It is a heathen superstition, as I have often told you. But many of you do it. Maria, I wish to speak to you seriously."

"Speak, mother," answered the young nun, the strong habit of submission returning instantly with the other's grave tone.

"These thoughts of yours are very wicked. We are placed in the world, and we must continue to live in it, as long as God wills that we should. When God is pleased to deliver us, He will take us in good time. You and I and the sisters should be thankful that during our brief stay on earth this sanctuary has fallen to our lot, and this possibility of a holy life. We must take every advantage of it, thanking Heaven if our stay be long enough for us to repent of our sins and obtain indulgence for our venial shortcomings. It is wicked to desire to shorten our lives. It is wicked to desire anything which is not the will of God. We are here to live, to watch and to pray — not to complain and to rebel."

The abbess was stout, as she herself admitted, and between her sudden surprise at her niece's wholly unorthodox, not to say blasphemous, suggestion of suicide as a means of grace, and her own attempt at eloquence, she grew rapidly warm, in spite of the comparatively cool draft which was passing out from the interior of the building. She

caught the end of her loose over-sleeve and fanned herself slowly when she had finished speaking.

But Maria Addolorata did not consider that she was answered. There in the cell of a Carmelite convent, in the heart of a young girl who had perhaps never heard of Shakespeare and who certainly knew nothing of Hamlet, the question of all questions found itself, and she found for it such speech as she could command. It broke out passionately and impatiently.

"What are we? And why are we what we are? Yes, mother — I know that you are good, and that all you say is true. But it is not all. There is all the world beyond it. To live, or not to live — but you know that this is not living! It is not meant to be living, as the people outside understand what living means. What does it all signify but death, when we take the veil, and lie before the altar, and are covered with a funeral pall? It means dying — then why not altogether dying? Has not God angels, in thousands, to praise Him and worship Him, and pray for sinners on earth? And they sing and pray gladly, because they are blessed and do not suffer, as we do. Why should God want us, poor little nuns, to live half dead, and to praise Him with voices that crack with the cold in winter, and to kneel till we faint with the heat in summer, and to wear out our bodies with fasting and prayer and penance, till it is all we can do to crawl to our

places in the choir? Not I — I am young and strong still — nor you, perhaps, for you are strong still, though you are not young. But many of the sisters — yes, they are the best ones, I know — they are killing themselves by inches before our eyes. You know it — I know it — they know it themselves. Why should they not find some shorter way of death for God's glory? Or if not, why should they not live happily, since many of them could? Why should God, who made us, wish us to destroy ourselves — or if He does, then why may we not do it in our own way? Ah — it would be so short — a knife-thrust, and then the great peace forever!"

The abbess had risen and was standing before Maria, one hand resting on the back of the rush-bottomed chair.

"Blasphemy!" she cried, finding breath at last. "It is blasphemy, or madness, or both! It is the evil one's own doing! Forgive her, good God! She does not know what she is saying! Almighty and most merciful God, forgive her!"

For a moment Maria Addolorata was silent, realizing how far she had forgotten herself, and startled by the abbess's terrified eyes and excited tone. But she was naturally a far more daring woman than she herself knew. Though her face was pale, her lips smiled at her good aunt's fright.

"But that is not an answer — just to cry 'blasphemy!'" she said. "The question is clear —"

She did not finish the sentence. The abbess was really beside herself with religious terror. With almost violent hands she dragged and thrust her niece down till Maria fell upon her knees.

"Pray, child! Pray, before it is too late!" she cried. "Pray on your knees that this possession may pass, before your soul is lost forever!"

She herself knelt beside the girl upon the stones, still clasping her and pressing her down. And she prayed aloud, long, fervently, almost wildly, appealing to God for protection against a bodily tempting devil, who by his will, and with evil strength, was luring and driving a human soul to utter damnation.

CHAPTER III.

"It is well," said Stefanone. "The world is come to an end. I will not say anything more."

He finished his tumbler of wine, leaned back on the wooden bench against the brown wall, played with the broad silver buttons of his dark blue jacket, and stared hard at Sor Tommaso, the doctor, who sat opposite to him. The doctor returned his glance rather unsteadily and betook himself to his snuffbox. It was of worn black ebony, adorned in the middle of the lid with a small view of Saint Peter's and the colonnades in mosaic, with a very blue sky. From long use, each tiny fragment of the mosaic was surrounded by a minute black line, which indeed lent some tone to the intensely clear atmosphere of the little picture, but gave the architecture represented therein a dirty and neglected appearance. The snuff itself, however, was of the superior quality known as Sicilian in those days, and was of a beautiful light brown colour.

"And why?" asked the doctor very slowly, between the operations of pinching, stuffing, snuffing, and dusting. "Why is the world come to an end?"

Stefanone's eyes grew sullen, with a sort of dull glare in their unwinking gaze. He looked dangerous just then, but the doctor did not seem to be in the least afraid of him.

"You, who have made it end, should know why," answered the peasant, after a short pause.

Stefanone was a man of the Roman type, of medium height, thick set and naturally melancholic, with thin, straight lips that were clean shaven, straight black hair, a small but aggressively aquiline nose and heavy hands, hairy on the backs of the fingers, between the knuckles. His wife, Sora Nanna, said that he had a fist like a paving-stone. He also looked as though he might have the constitution of a mule. He was at that time about five-and-thirty years of age, and there were a few strong lines in his face, notably those curved ones drawn from the beginning of the nostrils to the corners of the mouth, which are said to denote an uncertain temper.

He wore the dress of the richer peasants of that day, a coarse but spotless white shirt, very open at the throat, a jacket and waistcoat of stout dark blue cloth, with large and smooth silver buttons, knee-breeches, white stockings, and heavy low shoes with steel buckles. He combined the occupations of farmer, wine-seller, and carrier. When he was on the road between Subiaco and Rome, Gigetto, already mentioned, was supposed to represent him.

It was understood that Gigetto was to marry Annetta — if he could be prevailed upon to do so, for he was the younger son of a peasant family which held its head even higher than Stefanone, and the young man as well as his people looked upon Annetta's wild ways with disapproval, though her fortune, as the only child of Stefanone and Sora Nanna, was a very strong attraction. In the meantime, Gigetto acted as though he were the older man's partner in the wine-shop, and as he was a particularly honest, but also a particularly idle, young man with a taste for singing and playing on the guitar, the position suited him admirably.

As for Sor Tommaso, with whom Stefanone seemed inclined to quarrel on this particular evening, he was a highly respectable personage in a narrow-shouldered, high-collared black coat with broad skirts, and a snuff-coloured waistcoat. He wore a stock which was decidedly shabby, but decent, and the thin cuffs of his shirt were turned back over the tight sleeves of his coat, in the old fashion. He also wore amazingly tight black trousers, strapped closely over his well-blacked boots. To tell the truth, these nether garments, though of great natural resistance, had lived so long at a high tension, so to say, that they were no longer equally tight at all points, and there were, undoubtedly, certain perceptible spots on them; but, on the whole, the general effect of

the doctor's appearance was fashionable, in the fashion of several years earlier and judged by the standard of Subiaco. He wore his hair rather long, in a handsome iron-grey confusion, his face was close-shaven, and, though he was thin, his complexion was somewhat apoplectic.

Having duly and solemnly finished the operation of taking snuff, the doctor looked at the peasant.

"I do not wish to have said anything," he observed, by way of a general retractation. "These are probably follies."

"And for not having meant to say anything, you have planted this knife in my heart!" retorted Stefanone, the veins swelling at his temples. "Thank you. I wish to die, if I forget it. You tell me that this daughter of mine is making love with the Englishman. And then you say that you do not wish to have said anything! May he die, the Englishman, he, and whoever made him, with the whole family! An evil death on him and all his house!"

"So long as you do not make me die, too!" exclaimed Sor Tommaso, with rather a pitying smile.

"Eh! To die — it is soon said! And yet, people do die. You, who are a doctor, should know that. And you do not wish to have said anything! Bravo, doctor! Words are words. And yet they can sting. And after a thousand years, they still sting. You — what can you understand?

Are you perhaps a father? You have not even a wife. Oh, blessed be God! You do not even know what you are saying. You know nothing. You think, perhaps, because you are a doctor, that you know more than I do. I will tell you that you are an ignorant!"

"Oh, beautiful!" cried the doctor, angrily, stung by what is still almost a mortal insult. "You — to me — ignorant! Oh, beautiful, most beautiful, this! From a peasant to a man of science! Perhaps you too have a diploma from the University of the Sapienza —"

"If I had, I should wrap half a pound of sliced ham — fat ham, you know — in it, for the first customer. What should I do with your diplomas! I ask you, what do you know? Do you know at all what a daughter is? Blood of my blood, heart of my heart, hand of this hand. But I am a peasant, and you are a doctor. Therefore, I know nothing."

"And meanwhile you give me 'ignorant' in my face!" retorted Sor Tommaso.

"Yes — and I repeat it!" cried Stefanone, leaning forwards, his clenched hand on the table. "I say it twice, three times — ignorant, ignorant, ignorant! Have you understood?"

"Say it louder! In that way every one can hear you! Beast of a sheep-grazer!"

"And you — crow-feeder! Furnisher of grave-

diggers And then — ignorant! Oh — this time I have said it clearly!"

"And it seems to me that it is enough!" roared the doctor, across the table. "Ciociaro! Take that!"

"Ciociaro? I? Oh, your soul! If I get hold of you with my hands!"

A 'ciociaro' is a hill-man who wears 'cioce,' or rags, bound upon his feet with leathern sandals and thongs. He is generally a shepherd, and is held in contempt by the more respectable people of the larger mountain towns. To call a man a 'ciociaro' is a bitter insult.

Stefanone in his anger had half risen from his seat. But the wooden bench on which he had been sitting was close to the wall behind him, and the heavy oak table was pushed up within a few inches of his chest, so that his movements were considerably hampered as he stretched out his hands rather wildly towards his adversary. The latter, who possessed more moral than physical courage, moved his chair back and prepared to make his escape, if Stefanone showed signs of coming round the table.

At that moment a tall figure darkened the door that opened upon the street, and a quiet, dry voice spoke with a strong foreign accent. It was Angus Dalrymple, returning from a botanizing expedition in the hills, after being absent all day.

"That is a very uncomfortable way of fighting," he observed, as he stood still in the doorway. "You cannot hit a man across a table broader than your arm is long, Signor Stefano."

The effect of his words was instantaneous. Stefanone fell back into his seat. The doctor's anxious and excited expression resolved itself instantly into a polite smile.

"We were only playing," he said suavely. "A little discussion — a mere jest. Our friend Stefanone was explaining something."

"If the table had been narrower, he would have explained you away altogether," observed Dalrymple, coming forward.

He laid a tin box which he had with him upon the table, and shook hands with Sor Tommaso. Then he slipped behind the table and sat down close to his host, as a precautionary measure in case the play should be resumed. Stefanone would have had a bad chance of being dangerous, if the powerful Scotchman chose to hold him down. But the peasant seemed to have become as suddenly peaceful as the doctor.

"It was nothing," said Stefanone, quietly enough, though his eyes were bloodshot and glanced about the room in an unsettled way.

At that moment Annetta entered from a door leading to the staircase. Her eyes were fixed on Dalrymple's face as she came forward, carrying

a polished brass lamp, with three burning wicks, which she placed upon the table. Dalrymple looked up at her, and seeing her expression of inquiry, slowly nodded. With a laugh which drew her long red-brown lips back from her short white teeth, the girl produced a small flask and a glass, which she had carried behind her and out of sight when she came in. She set them before Dalrymple.

"I saw you coming," she said, and laughed again. "And then — it is always the same. Half a 'foglietta' of the old, just for the appetite."

Sor Tommaso glanced at Stefanone in a meaning way, but the girl's father affected not to see him. Dalrymple nodded his thanks, poured a few drops of wine into the glass and scattered them upon the brick floor according to the ancient custom, both for rinsing the glass and as a libation, and then offered to fill the glasses of each of the two men, who smiled, shook their heads, and covered their tumblers with their right hands. At last Dalrymple helped himself, nodded politely to his companions, and slowly emptied the glass which held almost all the contents of the little flask. The 'foglietta,' or 'leaflet' of wine, is said to have been so called from the twisted and rolled vine leaf which generally serves it for a stopper. A whole 'foglietta' contained a scant pint.

"Will you eat now?" asked Annetta, still smiling.

"Presently," answered Dalrymple. "What is there to eat? I am hungry."

"It seems that you have to say so!" laughed the girl. "It is a new thing. There is beefsteak or mutton, if you wish to know. And ham — a fresh ham cut to-day. It is one of the Grape-eater's, and it seems good. You remember, Sor Tommaso, the — speaking with respect to your face — the pig we called the Grape-eater last year? Speaking with respect, he was a good pig. It is one of his hams that we have cut. There is also salad, and fresh bread, which you like. And wine, I will not speak of it. Eh, he likes wine, the Englishman! He comes in with a long, long face — and when he goes to bed, his face is wide, wide. That is the wine. But then, it does nothing else to him. It only changes his face. When I look at him, I seem to see the moon waxing."

"You talk too much," said Stefanone.

"Never mind, papa! Words are not pennies. The more one wastes, the more one has!"

Dalrymple said nothing; but he smiled as she turned lightly with a toss of her small dark head and left the room.

"Fine blood," observed the doctor, with a conciliatory glance at the girl's father.

"You will be wanted before long, Sor Tommaso," said Dalrymple, gravely. "I hear that the abbess is very ill."

The doctor looked up with sudden interest, and put on his professional expression.

"The abbess, you say? Dear me! She is not young! What has she? Who told you, Sor Angoscia?"

Now, 'Sor Angoscia' signifies in English 'Sir Anguish,' but the doctor in spite of really conscientious efforts could not get nearer to the pronunciation of Angus. Nevertheless, with northern persistency, Dalrymple corrected him for the hundredth time. The doctor's first attempt had resulted in his calling the Scotchman 'Sor Langusta,' which means 'Sir Crayfish'—and it must be admitted that 'Anguish' was an improvement.

"Angus," said Dalrymple. "My name is Angus. The abbess has caught a severe cold from sitting in a draught when she was overheated. It has immediately settled on her lungs, and you may be sent for at any moment. I passed by the back of the convent on my way down, and the gardener was just coming out of the postern. He told me."

"Dear me, dear me!" exclaimed Sor Tommaso, shaking his head. "Cold — bronchitis, pleurisy, pneumonia — it is soon done! One would be enough! Those nuns, what do they eat? A little grass, a little boiled paste, a little broth of meat on Sundays. What strength should they have? And then pray, pray, sing, sing! It needs a chest! Poor lungs! I will go to my home and get ready — blisters —

mustard — a lancet — they will not allow a barber in the convent to bleed them. Well — I make myself the barber! What a life, what a life! If you wish to die young, be a doctor at Subiaco, Sor Angoscia. Good night, dear friend. Good night, Stefanone. I wish not to have said anything — you know — that little affair. Let us speak no more about it. I am more beast than you, because I said anything. Good night."

Sor Tommaso got his stick from a dark corner, pressed his broad catskin hat upon his head, and took his respectability away on its tightly encased black legs.

"And may the devil go with you," said Stefanone, under his breath, as the doctor disappeared.

"Why?" inquired Dalrymple, who had caught the words.

"I said nothing," answered the peasant, thoughtfully trimming one wick of the lamp with the bent brass wire which, with the snuffers, hung by a chain from the ring by which the lamp was carried.

"I thought you spoke," said the Scotchman. "Well — the abbess is very ill, and Sor Tommaso has a job."

"May he do it well! So that it need not be begun again."

"What do you mean?" Dalrymple slowly sipped the remains of his little measure of wine.

"Those nuns!" exclaimed Stefanone, instead of

answering the question. "What are they here to do, in this world? Better make saints of them — and good night! There would be one misery less. Do you know what they do? They make wine. Good! But they do not drink it. They sell it for a farthing less by the foglietta than other people. The devil take them and their wine!"

Dalrymple glanced at the angry peasant with some amusement, but did not make any answer.

"Eh, Signore!" cried Stefanone. "You who are a foreigner and a Protestant, can you not say something, since it would be no sin for you?"

"I was thinking of something to say, Signor Stefanone. But as for that, who does the business for the convent? They cannot do it themselves, I suppose. Who determines the price of their wine for them? Or the price of their corn?"

"They are not so stupid as you think. Oh, no! They are not stupid, the nuns. They know the price of this, and the cost of that, just as well as you and I do. But Gigetto's father, Sor Agostino, is their steward, if that is what you wish to know. And his father was before him, and Gigetto will be after him, with his pumpkin-head. And the rest is sung by the organ, as we say when mass is over. For you know about Gigetto and Annetta."

"Yes. And as you cannot quarrel with Sor Agostino on that account, I do not see but that

you will either have to bear it, or sell your wine a farthing cheaper than that of the nuns."

"Eh — that is soon said. A farthing cheaper than theirs! That means half a baiocco cheaper than I sell it now. And the best is only five baiocchi the foglietta, and the cheapest is two and a half. Good bye profit — a pleasant journey to Stefanone. But it is those nuns. They are to blame, and the devil will pay them."

"In that case you need not," observed Dalrymple, rising. "I am going to wash my hands before supper."

"At your pleasure, Signore," answered Stefanone, politely.

As Dalrymple went out, Annetta passed him at the door, bringing in plates and napkins, and knives and forks. The girl glanced at his face as he went by.

"Be quick, Signore," she said with a laugh. "The beefsteak of mutton is grilling."

He nodded, and went up the dark stairs, his heavy shoes sending back echoes as he trod. Stefanone still sat at the table, turning the glass wine measure upside down over his tumbler, to let the last drops run out. He watched them as they fell, one by one, without looking up at his daughter, who began to arrange the plates for Dalrymple's meal.

"I will teach you to make love with the English-

man," he said slowly, still watching the dropping wine.

"Me!" cried Annetta, with real or feigned astonishment, and she tossed a knife and fork angrily into a plate, with a loud, clattering noise.

"I am speaking with you," answered her father, without raising his eyes. "Do you know? You will come to a bad end."

"Thank you!" replied the girl, contemptuously. "If you say so, it must be true! Now, who has told you that the Englishman is making love to me? An apoplexy on him, whoever he may be!"

"Pretty words for a girl! Sor Tommaso told me. A little more, and I would have torn his tongue out. Just then, the Englishman came in. Sor Tommaso got off easily."

The girl's tone changed very much when she spoke again, and there was a dull and angry light in her eyes. Her long lips were still parted, and showed her gleaming teeth, but the smile was altogether gone.

"Yes. Too easily," she said, almost in a whisper, and there was a low hiss in the words.

"In the meanwhile, it is true — what he said," continued Stefanone. "You make eyes at him. You wait for him and watch for him when he comes back from the mountains —"

"Well? Is it not my place to serve him with his supper? If you are not satisfied, hire a ser-

vant to wait on him. You are rich. What do I care for the Englishman? Perhaps it is a pleasure to roast my face over the charcoal, cooking his meat for him. As for Sor Tommaso —"

She stopped short in her speech. Her father knew what the tone meant, and looked up for the first time.

"O-è!" he exclaimed, as one suddenly aware of a danger, and warning some one else.

"Nothing," answered Annetta, looking down and arranging the knives and forks symmetrically on the clean cloth she had laid.

"I might have killed him just now in hot blood, when the Englishman came in," said Stefanone, reflectively. "But now my blood has grown cold. I shall do nothing to him."

"So much the better for him." She still spoke in a low voice, as she turned away from the table.

"But I will kill you," said Stefanone, "if I see you making eyes at the Englishman."

He rose, and taking up his hat, which lay beside him, he edged his way out along the wooden bench, moving cautiously lest he should shake the table and upset the lamp or the bottles. Annetta had turned again, at the threat he had uttered, and stood still, waiting for him to get out into the room, her hands on her hips, and her eyes on fire.

"You will kill me?" she asked, just as he was opposite to her. "Well — kill me, then! Here

I am. What are you waiting for? For the Englishman to interfere? He is washing his hands. He always takes a long time."

"Then it is true that you have fallen in love with him?" asked Stefanone, his anger returning.

"Him, or another. What does it matter to you? You remind me of the old woman who beat her cat, and then cried when it ran away. If you want me to stay at home, you had better find me a husband."

"Do you want anything better than Gigetto? Apoplexy! But you have ideas!"

"You are making a good business of it with Gigetto, in truth!" cried the girl, scornfully. "He eats, he drinks, and then he sings. But he does not marry. He will not even make love to me — not even with an eye. And then, because I love the Englishman, who is a great lord, though he says he is a doctor, I must die. Well, kill me!" She stared insolently at her father for a moment. "Oh, well," she added scornfully, "if you have not time now, it must be for to-morrow. I am busy."

She turned on her heel with a disdainful fling of her short, dark skirt. Stefanone was exasperated, and his anger had returned. Before she was out of reach, he struck her with his open hand. Instead of striking her cheek, the blow fell upon the back of her head and neck, and sent her

stumbling forwards. She caught the back of a chair, steadied herself, and turned again instantly, at her full height, not deigning to raise her hand to the place that hurt her.

"Coward!" she exclaimed. "But I will pay you — and Sor Tommaso — for that blow."

"Whenever you like," answered her father gruffly, but already sorry for what he had done.

He turned his back, and went out into the night. It was now almost quite dark, and Annetta stood still by the chair, listening to his retreating footsteps. Then she slowly turned and gazed at the flaring wicks of the lamp. With a gesture that suggested the movement of a young animal, she rubbed the back of her neck with one hand and leisurely turned her head first to one side and then to the other. Her brown skin was unusually pale, but there was no moisture in her eyes as she stared at the lamp.

"But I will pay you, Sor Tommaso," she said thoughtfully and softly.

Then turning her eyes from the lamp at last, she took up one of the knives from the table, looked at it, felt the edge, and laid it down contemptuously. In those days all the respectable peasants in the Roman villages had solid silver forks and spoons, which have long since gone to the melting-pot to pay taxes. But they used the same blunt, pointless knives with wooden handles, which they use to-day.

Annetta started, as she heard Dalrymple's tread upon the stone steps of the staircase, but she recovered herself instantly, gave a finishing touch to the table, rubbed the back of her head quickly once more, and met him with a smile.

"Is the beefsteak of mutton ready?" inquired the Scotchman, cheerfully, with his extraordinary accent.

Annetta ran past him, and returned almost before he was seated, bringing the food. The girl sat down at the end of the table, opposite the street door, and watched him as he swallowed one mouthful of meat after another, now and then stopping to drink a tumbler of wine at a draught.

"You must be very strong, Signore," said Annetta, at last, her chin resting on her doubled hand.

"Why?" inquired Dalrymple, carelessly, between two mouthfuls.

"Because you eat so much. It must be a fine thing to eat so much meat. We eat very little of it."

"Why?" asked the Scotchman, again between his mouthfuls.

"Oh, who knows? It costs much. That must be the reason. Besides, it does not go down. I should not care for it."

"It is a habit." Dalrymple drank. "In my country most of the people eat oats," he said, as he set down his glass.

"Oats!" laughed the girl. "Like horses! But horses will eat meat, too, like you. As for me — good bread, fresh cheese, a little salad, a drink of wine and water — that is enough."

"Like the nuns," observed Dalrymple, attacking the ham of the 'Grape-eater.'

"Oh, the nuns! They live on boiled cabbage! You can smell it a mile away. But they make good cakes."

"You often go to the convent, do you not?" asked the Scotchman, filling his glass, for the first mouthful of ham made him thirsty again. "You take the linen up with your mother, I know."

"Sometimes, when I feel like going," answered the girl, willing to show that it was not her duty to carry baskets. "I only go when we have the small baskets that one can carry on one's head. I will tell you. They use the small baskets for the finer things, the abbess's linen, and the altar cloths, and the chaplain's lace, which belongs to the nuns. But the sheets and the table linen are taken up in baskets as long as a man. It takes four women to carry one of them."

"That must be very inconvenient," said Dalrymple. "I should think that smaller ones would always be better."

"Who knows? It has always been so. And when it has always been so, it will always be so — one knows that."

Annetta nodded her head rhythmically to convey an impression of the immutability of all ancient customs and of this one in particular.

Dalrymple, however, was not much interested in the question of the baskets.

"What do the nuns do all day?" he asked. "I suppose you see them, sometimes. There must be young ones amongst them."

Annetta glanced more keenly at the Scotchman's quiet face, and then laughed.

"There is one, if you could see her! The abbess's niece. Oh, that one is beautiful. She seems to me a painted angel!"

"The abbess's niece? What is she like? Let me see, the abbess is a princess, is she not?"

"Yes, a great princess of the Princes of Gerano, of Casa Braccio, you know. They are always abbesses. And the young one will be the next, when this one dies. She is Maria Addolorata, in religion, but I do not know her real name. She has a beautiful face and dark eyes. Once I saw her hair for a moment. It is fair, but not like yours. Yours is red as a tomato."

"Thank you," said Dalrymple, with something like a laugh. "Tell me more about the nun."

"If I tell you, you will fall in love with her," objected Annetta. "They say that men with red hair fall in love easily. Is it true? If it is, I will not tell you any more about the nun. But

I think you are in love with the poor old Grape-eater. It is good ham, is it not? By Bacchus, I fed him on chestnuts with my own hands, and he was always stealing the grapes. Chestnuts fattened him and the grapes made him sweet. Speaking with respect, he was a pig for a pope."

"He will do for a Scotch doctor then," answered Dalrymple. "Tell me, what does this beautiful nun do all day long?"

"What does she do? What can a nun do? She eats cabbage and prays like the others. But she has charge of all the convent linen, so I see her when I go with my mother. That is because the Princes of Gerano first gave the linen to the convent after it was all stolen by the Turks in 1798. So, as they gave it, their abbesses take care of it."

Dalrymple laughed at the extraordinary historical allusion compounded of the very ancient traditions of the Saracens in the south, and of the more recent wars of Napoleon.

"So she takes care of the linen," he said. "That cannot be very amusing, I should think."

"They are nuns," answered the girl. "Do you suppose they go about seeking to amuse themselves? It is an ugly life. But Sister Maria Addolorata sings to herself, and that makes the abbess angry, because it is against the rules to sing except in church. I would not live in that con-

vent — not if they would fill my apron with gold pieces."

"But why did this beautiful girl become a nun, then? Was she unhappy, or crossed in love?"

"She? They did not give her time! Before she could shut an eye and say, 'Little youth, you please me, and I wish you well,' they put her in. And that door, when it is shut, who shall open it? The Madonna, perhaps? But she was of the Princes of Gerano, and there must be one of them for an abbess, and the lot fell upon her. There is the whole history. You may hear her singing sometimes, if you stand under the garden wall, on the narrow path after the Benediction hour and before Ave Maria. But I am a fool to tell you, for you will go and listen, and when you have heard her voice you will be like a madman. You will fall in love with her. I was a fool to tell you."

"Well? And if I do fall in love with her, who cares?" Dalrymple slowly filled a glass of wine.

"If you do?" The young girl's eyes shot a quick, sharp glance at him. Then her face suddenly grew grave as she saw that some one was at the street door, looking in cautiously. "Come in, Sor Tommaso!" she called, down the table. "Papa is out, but we are here. Come in and drink a glass of wine!"

The doctor, wrapped in a long broadcloth cloak

with a velvet collar, and having a case of instruments and medicines under his arm, glanced round the room and came in.

"Just a half-foglietta, my daughter," he said. "They have sent for me. The abbess is very ill, and I may be there a long time. If you think they would remember to offer a Christian a glass up there, you are very much mistaken."

"They are nuns," laughed Annetta. "What can they know?"

She rose to get the wine for the doctor. There had not been a trace of displeasure in her voice nor in her manner as she spoke.

CHAPTER IV.

Sor Tommaso was rarely called to the convent. In fact, he could not remember that he had been wanted more than half a dozen times in the long course of his practice in Subiaco. Either the nuns were hardly ever ill, or else they must have doctored themselves with such simple remedies as had been handed down to them from former ages. Possibly they had been as well off on the whole as though they had systematically submitted to the heroic treatment which passed for medicine in those days. As a matter of fact, they suffered chiefly from bad colds; and when they had bad colds, they either got well, or died, according to their several destinies. Sor Tommaso might have saved some of them; but on the other hand, he might have helped some others rather precipitately from their cells to that deep crypt, closed, in the middle of the little church, by a single square flag of marble, having two brass studs in it, and bearing the simple inscription: 'Here lie the bones of the Reverend Sisters of the order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel.' On the whole, it is doubtful whether the practice of not calling in

the doctor on ordinary occasions had much influence upon the convent's statistics of mortality.

But though the abbess had more than once had a cold in her life, she had never suffered so seriously as this time, and she had made little objection to her niece's strong representations as to the necessity of medical aid. Therefore Sor Tommaso had been sent for in the evening and in great haste, and had taken with him a supply of appropriate material sufficient to kill, if not to cure, half the nuns in the convent. All the circumstances which he remembered from former occasions were accurately repeated. He rang at the main gate, waited long in the darkness, and heard at last the slapping and shuffling of shoes along the pavement within, as the portress and another nun came to let him in. Then there were faint rays of light from their little lamp, quivering through the cracks of the old weather-beaten door upon the cracked marble steps on which Sor Tommaso was standing. A thin voice asked who was there, and Sor Tommaso answered that he was the doctor. Then he heard a little colloquy in suppressed tones between the two nuns. The one said that the doctor was expected and must be let in without question. The other observed that it might be a thief. The first said that in that case they must look through the loophole. The second said that she did not know the doctor by sight. The first

speaker remarked with some truth that one could tell a respectable person from a highwayman, and suddenly a small square porthole in the door was opened inwards, and a stream of light fell upon Sor Tommaso's face, as the nuns held up their little flaring lamp behind the grating. Behind the lamp he could distinguish a pair of shadowy eyes under an overhanging veil, which was also drawn across the lower part of the face.

"Are you really the doctor?" asked one of the voices, in a doubtful tone.

"He himself," answered the physician. "I am the Doctor Tommaso Taddei of the University of the Sapienza, and I have been called to render assistance to the very reverend the Mother Abbess."

The light disappeared, and the porthole was shut, while a second colloquy began. On the whole, the two nuns decided to let him in, and then there was a jingling of keys and a clanking of iron bars and a grinding of locks, and presently a small door, cut and hung in one leaf of the great, iron-studded, wooden gate, was swung back. Sor Tommaso stooped and held his case before him, for the entrance was low and narrow.

"God be praised!" he exclaimed, when he was fairly inside.

"And praised be His holy name," answered both the sisters, promptly.

Both had dropped their veils, and proceeded to

bolt and bar the little door again, having set down the lamp upon the pavement. The rays made the unctuous dampness of the stone flags glisten, and Sor Tommaso shivered in his broadcloth cloak. Then, as before, he was conducted in silence through arched ways, and up many steps, and along labyrinthine corridors, his strong shoes rousing sharp, metallic echoes, while the nuns' slippers slapped and shuffled as one walked on each side of him, the one on the left carrying the lamp, according to the ancient rules of politeness. At last they reached the door of the antechamber at the end of the corridor, through which the way led to the abbess's private apartment, consisting of three rooms. The last door on the left, as Sor Tommaso faced that which opened into the antechamber, was that of Maria Addolorata's cell. The linen presses were entered from within the anteroom by a door on the right, so that they were actually in the abbess's apartment, an old-fashioned and somewhat inconvenient arrangement. Maria Addolorata, her veil drawn down, so that she could not see the doctor, but only his feet, and the folds of it drawn across her chin and mouth, received him at the door, which she closed behind him. The other two nuns set down their lamp on the floor of the corridor, slipped their hands up their sleeves, and stood waiting outside.

The abbess was very ill, but had insisted upon

sitting up in her parlour to receive the doctor, dressed and veiled, being propped up in her great easy-chair with a pillow which was of green silk, but was covered with a white pillow-case finely embroidered with open work at each end, through which the vivid colour was visible — that high green which cannot look blue even by lamplight. Both in the anteroom and in the parlour there were polished silver lamps of precisely the same pattern as the brass ones used by the richer peasants, excepting that each had a fan-like shield of silver to be used as a shade on one side, bearing the arms of the Braccio family in high boss, and attached to the oil vessel by a movable curved arm. The furniture of the room was very simple, but there was nevertheless a certain ecclesiastical solemnity about the high-backed, carved, and gilt chairs, the black and white marble pavement, the great portrait of his Holiness, Gregory the Sixteenth, in its massive gilt frame, the superb silver crucifix which stood on the writing-table, and, altogether, in the solidity of everything which met the eye.

It was no easy matter to ascertain the good lady's condition, muffled up and veiled as she was. It was only as an enormous concession to necessity that Sor Tommaso was allowed to feel her pulse, and it needed all Maria Addolorata's eloquent persuasion and sensible argument to induce her to lift her veil a little, and open her mouth.

"Your most reverend excellency must be cured by proxy," said Sor Tommaso, at his wit's end. "If this reverend mother," he added, turning to the young nun, "will carry out my directions, something may be done. Your most reverend excellency's life is in danger. Your most reverend excellency ought to be in bed."

"It is the will of Heaven," said the abbess, in a very weak and hoarse voice.

"Tell me what to do," said Maria Addolorata. "It shall be done as though you yourself did it."

Sor Tommaso was encouraged by the tone of assurance in which the words were spoken, and proceeded to give his directions, which were many, and his recommendations, which were almost endless.

"But if your most reverend excellency would allow me to assist you in person, the remedies would be more efficacious," he suggested, as he laid out the greater part of the contents of his case upon the huge writing-table.

"You seem to forget that this is a religious house," replied the abbess, and she might have said more, but was interrupted by a violent attack of coughing, during which Maria Addolorata supported her and tried to ease her.

"It will be better if you go away," said the nun, at last. "I will do all you have ordered, and your presence irritates her. Come back to-morrow morning, and I will tell you how she is progressing."

The abbess nodded slowly, confirming her niece's words. Sor Tommaso very reluctantly closed his case, placed it under his arm, gathered up his broadcloth cloak with his hat, and made a low obeisance before the sick lady.

"I wish your most reverend excellency a good rest and speedy recovery," he said. "I am your most reverend excellency's most humble servant."

Maria Addolorata led him out into the antechamber. There she paused, and they were alone together for a moment, all the doors being closed. The doctor stood still beside her, waiting for her to speak.

"What do you think?" she asked.

"I do not wish to say anything," he answered. "What do you wish me to say? A stroke of air, a cold, a bronchitis, a pleurisy, a pneumonia. Thanks be to Heaven, there is little fever. What do you wish me to say? For the stroke of air, a little good wine; for the cold, warm covering; for the bronchitis, the tea of marshmallows; for the pleurisy, severe blistering; for the pneumonia, a good mustard plaster; for the general system, the black draught; above all, nothing to eat. Frictions with hot oil will also do good. It is the practice of medicine by proxy, my lady mother. What do you wish me to say? I am disposed. I am her most reverend excellency's very humble servant. But I cannot perform miracles. Pray to the Ma-

donna to perform them. I have not even seen the tip of her most reverend excellency's most wise tongue. What can I do?"

"Well, then, come back to-morrow morning, and I will see you here," said Maria Addolorata.

Sor Tommaso found the nuns waiting for him with their little lamp in the corridor, and they led him back through the vaulted passages and staircases and let him out into the night without a word.

The night was dark and cloudy. It had grown much darker since he had come up, as the last lingering light of evening had faded altogether from the sky. The October wind drew down in gusts from the mountains above Subiaco, and blew the doctor's long cloak about so that it flapped softly now and then like the wings of a night bird. After descending some distance, he carefully set down his case upon the stones and fumbled in his pockets for his snuffbox, which he found with some difficulty. A gust blew up a grain of snuff into his right eye, and he stamped angrily with the pain, hurting his foot against a rolling stone as he did so. But he succeeded in getting his snuff to his nose at last. Then he bent down in the dark to take up his case, which was close to his feet, though he could hardly see it. The gusty south wind blew the long skirts of his cloak over his head and made them flap about his ears. He groped for the box.

Just then the doctor heard light footsteps coming down the path behind him. He called out, warning that he was in the way.

"O-è, gently, you know!" he cried. "An apoplexy on the wind!" he added vehemently, as his head and hands became entangled more and more in the folds of his cloak.

"And another on you!" answered a woman's voice, speaking low through clenched teeth.

In the darkness a hand rose and fell with something in it, three times in quick succession. A man's low cry of pain was stifled in folds of broadcloth. The same light footsteps were heard for a moment again in the narrow, winding way, and Sor Tommaso was lying motionless on his face across his box, with his cloak over his head. The gusty south wind blew up and down between the dark walls, bearing now and then a few withered vine leaves and wisps of straw with it; and the night grew darker still, and no one passed that way for a long time.

CHAPTER V.

When Angus Dalrymple had finished his supper, he produced a book and sat reading by the light of the wicks of the three brass lamps. Annetta had taken away the things and had not come back again. Gigetto strolled in and took his guitar from the peg on the wall, and idled about the room, tuning it and humming to himself. He was a tall young fellow with a woman's face and beautiful velvet-like eyes, as handsome and idle a youth as you might meet in Subiaco on a summer's feast-day. He exchanged a word of greeting with Dalrymple, and, seeing that the place was otherwise deserted, he at last slung his guitar over his shoulder, pulled his broad black felt hat over his eyes, and strolled out through the half-open door, presumably in search of amusement. Gigetto's chief virtue was his perfectly childlike and unaffected taste for amusing himself, on the whole very innocently, whenever he got a chance. It was natural that he and the Scotchman should not care for one another's society. Dalrymple looked after him for a moment and then went back to his book. A big glass measure of wine stood

beside him not half empty, and his glass was full.

He was making a strong effort to concentrate his attention upon the learned treatise, which formed a part of the little library he had brought with him. But Annetta's idle talk about the nuns, and especially about Maria Addolorata and her singing, kept running through his head in spite of his determination to be serious. He had been living the life of a hermit for months, and had almost forgotten the sound of an educated woman's voice. To him Annetta was nothing more than a rather pretty wild animal. It did not enter his head that she might be in love with him. Sora Nanna was simply an older and uglier animal of the same species. To a man of Dalrymple's temperament, and really devoted to the pursuit of a serious object, a woman quite incapable of even understanding what that object is can hardly seem to be a woman at all.

But the young Scotchman was not wanting in that passionate and fantastic imagination which so often underlies and even directs the hardy northern nature, and the young girl's carelessly spoken words had roused it to sudden activity. In spite of himself, he was already forming plans for listening under the convent wall, if perchance he might catch the sound of the nun's wonderful voice, and from that to the wildest schemes for catching a

momentary glimpse of the singer was only a step. At the same time, he was quite aware that such schemes were dangerous if not impracticable, and his reasonable self laughed down his unreasoning romance, only to be confronted by it again as soon as he tried to turn his attention to his book.

He looked up and saw that he had not finished his wine, though at that hour the measure was usually empty, and he wondered why he was less thirsty than usual. By force of habit he emptied the full glass and poured more into it, — by force of that old northern habit of drinking a certain allowance as a sort of duty, more common in those days than it is now. Then he began to read again, never dreaming that his strong head and solid nerves could be in any way affected by his potations. But his imagination this evening worked faster and faster, and his sober reason was recalcitrant and abhorred work.

The nun had fair hair and dark eyes and a beautiful face. Those were much more interesting facts than he could find in his work. She had a wonderful voice. He tried to recall all the extraordinary voices he had heard in his life, but none of them had ever affected him very much, though he had a good ear and some taste for music. He wondered what sort of voice this could be, and he longed to hear it. He shut up his book impatiently, drank more wine rose and went to the open door. The

gusty south wind fanned his face pleasantly, and he wished he were to sleep out of doors.

The Sora Nanna, who had been spending the evening with a friend in the neighbourhood, came in, her thin black overskirt drawn over her head to keep the embroidered head-cloth in its place. By and by, as Dalrymple still stood by the door, Stefanone appeared, having been to play a game of cards at a friendly wine-shop. He sat down by Sora Nanna at the table. She was mixing some salad in a big earthenware bowl adorned with green and brown stripes. They talked together in low tones. Dalrymple had nodded to each in turn, but the gusty air pleased him, and he remained standing by the door, letting it blow into his face.

It was growing late. Italian peasants are not great sleepers, and it is their custom to have supper at a late hour, just before going to bed. By this time it was nearly ten o'clock as we reckon the hours, or about 'four of the night' in October, according to old Italian custom, which reckons from a theoretical moment of darkness, supposed to begin at Ave Maria, half an hour after sunset.

Suddenly Dalrymple heard Annetta's voice in the room behind him, speaking to her mother. He had no particular reason for supposing that she had been out of the house since she had cleared the table and left him, but unconsciously he had the impression that she had been away,

and was surprised to hear her in the room, after expecting that she should pass him, coming in from the street, as the others had done. He turned and walked slowly towards his place at the table.

"I thought you had gone out," he said carelessly, to Annetta.

The girl turned her head quickly.

"I?" she cried. "And alone? Without even Gigetto? When do I ever go out alone at night? Will you have some supper, Signore?"

"I have just eaten, thank you," answered Dalrymple, seating himself.

"Three hours ago. It was not yet an hour of the night when you ate. Well — at your pleasure. Do not complain afterwards that we make you die of hunger."

"Bread, Annetta!" said Stefanone, gruffly but good-naturedly. "And cheese, and salt — wine, too! A thousand things! Quickly, my daughter."

"Quicker than this?" inquired the girl, who had already placed most of the things he asked for upon the table.

"I say it to say it," answered her father. "'Hunger makes long jumps,' and I am hungry."

"Did you win anything?" asked Sora Nanna, with both her elbows on the table.

"Five baiocchi."

"It was worth while to pay ten baiocchi for another man's bad wine, for the sake of winning

so much!" replied Sora Nanna, who was a careful soul. "Of course you paid for the wine?"

"Eh — of course. They pay for wine when they come here. One takes a little and one gives a little. This is life."

Annetta busied herself with the simple preparations for supper, while they talked. Dalrymple watched her idly, and he thought she was pale, and that her eyes were very bright. She had set a plate for herself, but had forgotten her glass.

"And you? Do you not drink?" asked Stefanone. "You have no glass."

"What does it matter?" She sat down between her father and mother.

"Drink out of mine, my little daughter," said Stefanone, holding his glass to her lips with a laugh, as though she had been a little child.

She looked quietly into his eyes for a moment, before she touched the wine with her lips.

"Yes," she answered, with a little emphasis. "I will drink out of your glass now."

"Better so," laughed Stefanone, who was glad to be reconciled, for he loved the girl, in spite of his occasional violence of temper.

"What does it mean?" asked Sora Nanna, her cunning peasant's eyes looking from one to the other, and seeming to belie her stupid face.

"Nothing," answered Stefanone. "We were playing together. Signor Englishman," he said,

turning to Dalrymple, "you must sometimes wish that you were married, and had a wife like Nanna, and a daughter like Annetta."

"Of course I do," said Dalrymple, with a smile.

Before very long, he took his book and went upstairs to bed, being tired and sleepy after a long day spent on the hillside in a fruitless search for certain plants which, according to his books, were to be found in that part of Italy, but which he had not yet seen. He fell asleep, thinking of Maria Addolorata's lovely face and fair hair, on which he had never laid eyes. In his dreams he heard a rare voice ringing true, that touched him strangely. The gusty wind made the panes of his bedroom window rattle, and in the dream he was tapping on Maria Addolorata's casement and calling softly to her, to open it and speak to him, or calling her by name, with his extraordinary foreign accent. And he thought he was tapping louder and louder, upon the glass and upon the wooden frame, louder and louder still. Then he heard his name called out, and his heart jumped as though it would have turned upside down in its place, and then seemed to sink again like a heavy stone falling into deep water; for he was awake, and the voice that was calling him was certainly not that of the beautiful nun, but gruff and manly; also the tapping was not tapping any more upon a case-

ment, but was a vigorous pounding against his own bolted door.

Dalrymple sat up suddenly and listened, wide awake at once. The square of his window was faintly visible in the darkness, as though the dawn were breaking. He called out, asking who was outside.

"Get up, Signore! Get up! You are wanted quickly!" It was Stefanone.

Dalrymple struck a light, for he had a supply of matches with him, a convenience of modern life not at that time known in Subiaco, except as an expensive toy, though already in use in Rome. As he was, he opened the door. Stefanone came in, dressed in his shirt and breeches, pale with excitement.

"You must dress yourself, Signore," he said briefly, as he glanced at the Scotchman, and then set down the small tin and glass lantern he carried.

"What is the matter?" inquired Dalrymple, yawning, and stretching his great white arms over his head, till his knuckles struck the low ceiling; for he was a tall man.

"The matter is that they have killed Sor Tommaso," answered the peasant.

Dalrymple uttered an exclamation of surprise and incredulity.

"It is as I say," continued Stefanone. "They

found him lying across the way, in the street, with knife-wounds in him, as many as you please."

"That is horrible!" exclaimed Dalrymple, turning, and calmly trimming his lamp, which burned badly at first.

"Then dress yourself, Signore!" said Stefanone, impatiently. "You must come!"

"Why? If he is dead, what can I do?" asked the northern man, coolly. "I am sorry. What more can I say?"

"But he is not dead yet!" Stefanone was growing excited. "They have taken him —"

"Oh! he is alive, is he?" interrupted the Scotchman, dashing at his clothes, as though he were suddenly galvanized into life himself. "Then why did you tell me they had killed him?" he asked, with a curious, dry calmness of voice, as he instantly began to dress himself. "Get some clean linen, Signor Stefano. Tear it up into strips as broad as your hand, for bandages, and set the women to make a little lint of old linen — cotton is not good. Where have they taken Sor Tommaso?"

"To his own house," answered the peasant.

"So much the better. Go and make the bandages."

Dalrymple pushed Stefanone towards the door with one hand, while he continued to fasten his clothes with the other.

Stefanone was not without some experience of

similar cases, so he picked up his lantern and went off. In less than a quarter of an hour, he and Dalrymple were on their way to Sor Tommaso's house, which was in the piazza of Subiaco, not far from the principal church. Half a dozen peasants, who had met the muleteers bringing the wounded doctor home from the spot where he had been found, followed the two men, talking excitedly in low voices and broken sentences. The dawn was grey above the houses, and the autumn mists had floated up to the parapet on the side where the little piazza looked down to the valley, and hung motionless in the still air, like a stage sea in a theatre. In the distance was heard the clattering of mules' shoes, and occasionally the deep clanking of the goats' bells. Just as the little party reached the small, dark green door of the doctor's house the distant convent bells tolled one, then two quick strokes, then three again, and then five, and then rang out the peal for the morning Angelus. The door of the dirty little coffee shop in the piazza was already open, and a faint light burned within. The air was damp, quiet and strangely resonant, as it often is in mountain towns at early dawn. The gusty October wind had gone down, after blowing almost all night.

The case was far from being as serious as Dalrymple had expected, and he soon convinced himself that Sor Tommaso was not in any great danger.

He had fainted from fright and some loss of blood, but neither of the two thrusts which had wounded him had penetrated to his lungs, and the third was little more than a scratch. Doubtless he owed his safety in part to the fact that the wind had blown his cloak in folds over his shoulders and head. But it was also clear that his assailant had possessed no experience in the use of the knife as a weapon. When the group of men at the door were told that Sor Tommaso was not mortally wounded, they went away somewhat disappointed at the insignificant ending of the affair, though the doctor was not an unpopular man in the town.

"It is some woman," said one of them, contemptuously. "What can a woman do with a knife? Worse than a cat — she scratches, and runs away."

"Some little jealousy," observed another. "Eh! Sor Tommaso — who knows where he makes love? But meanwhile he is growing old, to be so gay."

"The old are the worst," replied the first speaker. "Since it is nothing, let us have a baiocco's worth of acquavita, and let us go away."

So they turned into the dirty little coffee shop to get their pennyworth of spirits. Meanwhile Dalrymple was washing and binding up his friend's wounds. Sor Tommaso groaned and winced under every touch, and the Scotchman, with dry gentleness, did his best to reassure him. Stefanone looked on in silence for some time,

helping Dalrymple when he was needed. The doctor's servant-woman, a somewhat grimy peasant, was sitting on the stairs, sobbing loudly.

"It is useless," moaned Sor Tommaso. "I am dead."

"I may be mistaken," answered Dalrymple, "but I think not."

And he continued his operations with a sure hand, greatly to the admiration of Stefanone, who had often seen knife-wounds dressed. Gradually Sor Tommaso became more calm. His face, from having been normally of a bright red, was now very pale, and his watery blue eyes blinked at the light helplessly like a kitten's, as he lay still on his pillow. Stefanone went away to his occupations at last, and Dalrymple, having cleared away the litter of unused bandages and lint, and set things in order, sat down by the bedside to keep his patient company for a while. He was really somewhat anxious lest the wounds should have taken cold.

"If I get well, it will be a miracle," said Sor Tommaso, feebly. "I must think of my soul."

"By all means," answered the Scotchman. "It can do your soul no harm, and contemplation rests the body."

"You Protestants have not human sentiment," observed the Italian, moving his head slowly on the pillow. "But I also think of the abbess. I

was to have gone there early this morning. She will also die. We shall both die."

Dalrymple crossed one leg over the other, and looked quietly at the doctor.

"Sor Tommaso," he said, "there is no other physician in Subiaco. I am a doctor, properly licensed to practise. It is evidently my duty to take care of your patients while you are ill."

"Mercy!" cried Sor Tommaso, with sudden energy, and opening his eyes very wide.

"Are you afraid that I shall kill them," asked Dalrymple, with a smile.

"Who knows? A foreigner! And the people say that you have converse with the devil. But the common people are ignorant."

"Very."

"And as for the convent — a Protestant — for the abbess! They would rather die. Figure to yourself what sort of a scandal there would be! A Protestant in a convent, and then, in that convent, too! The abbess would much rather die in peace."

"At all events, I will go and offer my services. If the abbess prefers to die in peace, she can answer to that effect. I will ask her what she thinks about it."

"Ask her!" repeated Sor Tommaso. "Do you imagine that you could see her? But what can you know? I tell you that last night she was

muffled up in her chair, and her face covered. It needed the grace of Heaven, that I might feel her pulse! As for her tongue, God knows what it is like! I have not seen it. Not so much as the tip of it! Not even her eyes did I see. And to-day I was not to be admitted at all, because the abbess would be in bed. Imagine to yourself, with blisters and sinapisms, and a hundred things. I was only to speak with Sister Maria Addolorata, who is her niece, you know, in the anteroom of the abbess's apartment. They would not let you in. They would give you a bath of holy water through the loophole of the convent door and say, 'Go away, sinner; this is a religious house!' You know them very little."

"You are talking too much," observed Dalrymple, who had listened attentively. "It is not good for you. Besides, since you are able to speak, it would be better if you told me who stabbed you last night, that I may go to the police, and have the person arrested, if possible."

"You do not know what you are saying," answered Sor Tommaso, with sudden gravity. "The woman has relations — who could handle a knife better than she."

And he turned his face away.

CHAPTER VI.

The sun was high when Dalrymple left Sor Tommaso in charge of the old woman-servant and went back to Stefanone's house to dress himself with more care than he had bestowed upon his hasty toilet at dawn. And now that he had plenty of time, he was even more careful of his appearance than usual; for he had fully determined to attempt to take Sor Tommaso's place in attendance upon the abbess. He therefore put on a coat of a sober colour and brushed his straight red hair smoothly back from his forehead, giving himself easily that extremely grave and trust-inspiring air which distinguishes many Scotchmen, and supports their solid qualities, while it seems to deny the possibility of any adventurous and romantic tendency.

At that hour nobody was about the house, and Dalrymple, stick in hand, sallied forth upon his expedition, looking for all the world as though he were going to church in Edinburgh instead of meditating an entrance into an Italian convent. He had said nothing more to the doctor on the subject. The people in the streets had most of them seen

him often and knew him by name, and it did not occur to any one to wonder why a foreigner should wear one sort of coat rather than another, when he took his walks abroad. He walked leisurely; for the sky had cleared, and the sun was hot. Moreover, he followed the longer road in order to keep his shoes clean, instead of climbing up the narrow and muddy lane in which Sor Tommaso had been attacked. He reached the convent door at last, brushed a few specks of dust from his coat, settled his high collar and the broad black cravat which was then taking the place of the stock, and rang the bell with one steady pull. There was, perhaps, no occasion for nervousness. At all events, Dalrymple was as deliberate in his movements and as calm in all respects as he had ever been in his life. Only, just after he had pulled the weather-beaten bell-chain, a half-humorous smile bent his even lips and was gone again in a moment.

There was the usual slapping and shuffling of slippers in the vaulted archway within, but as it was now day, the loophole was opened immediately, and the portress came alone. Dalrymple explained in strangely accented but good Italian that Sor Tommaso had met with an accident in the night; that he, Angus Dalrymple, was a friend of the doctor's and a doctor himself, and had undertaken all of Sor Tommaso's duties, and, finally, that he begged the portress to find Sister Maria Addolo-

rata, to repeat his story, and to offer his humble services in the cause of the abbess's recovery. All of which the veiled nun within heard patiently to the end.

"I will speak to Sister Maria Addolorata," she said. "Have the goodness to wait."

"Outside?" inquired Dalrymple, as the little shutter of the loophole was almost closed.

"Of course," answered the nun, opening it again, and shutting it as soon as she had spoken.

Dalrymple waited a long time in the blazing sun. The main entrance of the convent faced to the southeast, and it was not yet midday. He grew hot, after his walk, and softly wiped his forehead, and carefully folded his handkerchief again before returning it to his pocket. At last he heard the sound of steps again, and in a few seconds the loophole was once more opened.

"Sister Maria Addolorata will speak with you," said the portress's voice, as he approached his face to the little grating.

He felt an odd little thrill of pleasant surprise. But so far as seeing anything was concerned, he was disappointed. Instead of one veiled nun, there were now two veiled nuns.

"Madam," he began, "my friend Doctor Tommaso Taddei has met with an accident which prevents him from leaving his bed." And he went on to repeat all that he had told the portress, with such

further explanations as he deemed necessary and persuasive.

While he spoke, Maria Addolorata drew back a little into the deeper shadow away from the loophole. Her veil hung over her eyes, and the folds were drawn across her mouth, but she gradually raised her head, throwing it back until she could see Dalrymple's face from beneath the edge of the black material. In so doing she unconsciously uncovered her mouth. The Scotchman saw a good part of her features, and gazed intently at what he saw, rightly judging that as the sun was behind him, she could hardly be sure whether he were looking at her or not.

As for her, she was doubtless inspired by a natural curiosity, but at the same time she understood the gravity of the case and wished to form an opinion as to the advisability of admitting the stranger. A glance told her that Dalrymple was a gentleman, and she was reassured by the gravity of his voice and by the fact that he was evidently acquainted with the abbess's condition, and must, therefore, be a friend of Sor Tommaso. When he had finished speaking, she immediately looked down again, and seemed to be hesitating.

"Open the door, Sister Filomena," she said at last.

The portress shook her head almost imperceptibly as she obeyed, but she said nothing. The

whole affair was in her eyes exceedingly irregular. Maria Addolorata should have retired to the little room adjoining the convent parlour, and separated from it by a double grating, and Dalrymple should have been admitted to the parlour itself, and they should have said what they had to say to one another through the bars, in the presence of the portress. But Maria Addolorata was the abbess's niece. The abbess was too ill to give orders — too ill even to speak, it was rumoured. In a few days Maria Addolorata might be 'Her most Reverend Excellency.' Meanwhile she was mistress of the situation, and it was safer to obey her. Moreover, the portress was only a lay sister, an old and ignorant creature, accustomed to do what she was told to do by the ladies of the convent.

Dalrymple took off his hat and stooped low to enter through the small side-door. As soon as he had passed the threshold, he stood up to his height and then made a low bow to Maria Addolorata, whose veil now quite covered her eyes and prevented her from seeing him, — a fact which he realized immediately.

"Give warning to the sisters, Sister Filomena," said Maria Addolorata to the portress, who nodded respectfully and walked away into the gloom under the arches, leaving the nun and Dalrymple together by the door.

"It is necessary to give warning," she explained, "lest you should meet any of the sisters unveiled in the corridors, and they should be scandalized."

Dalrymple again bowed gravely and stood still, his eyes fixed upon Maria Addolorata's veiled head, but wandering now and then to her heavy but beautifully shaped white hands, which she held carelessly clasped before her and holding the end of the great rosary of brown beads which hung from her side. He thought he had never seen such hands before. They were high-bred, and yet at the same time there was a strongly material attraction about them.

He did not know what to say, and as nothing seemed to be expected of him, he kept silence for some time. At last Maria Addolorata, as though impatient at the long absence of the portress, tapped the pavement softly with her sandal slipper, and turned her head in the direction of the arches as though to listen for approaching footsteps.

"I hope that the abbess is no worse than when Doctor Taddei saw her last night," observed Dalrymple.

"Her most reverend excellency," answered Maria Addolorata, with a little emphasis, as though to teach him the proper mode of addressing the abbess, "is suffering. She has had a bad night."

"I shall hope to be allowed to give some advice

to her most reverend excellency," said Dalrymple, to show that he had understood the hint.

"She will not allow you to see her. But you shall come with me to the antechamber, and I will speak with her and tell you what she says."

"I shall be greatly obliged, and will do my best to give good advice without seeing the patient."

Another pause followed, during which neither moved. Then Maria Addolorata spoke again, further reassured, perhaps, by Dalrymple's quiet and professional tone. She had too lately left the world to have lost the habit of making conversation to break an awkward silence. Years of seclusion, too, instead of making her shy and silent, had given her something of the ease and coolness of a married woman. This was natural enough, considering that she was born of worldly people and had acquired the manners of the world in her own home, in childhood.

"You are an Englishman, I presume, Signor Doctor?" she observed, in a tone of interrogation.

"A Scotchman, Madam," answered Dalrymple, correcting her and drawing himself up a little. "My name is Angus Dalrymple."

"It is the same — an Englishman or a Scotchman," said the nun.

"Pardon me, Madam, we consider that there is a great difference. The Scotch are chiefly Celts. Englishmen are Anglo-Saxons."

"But you are all Protestants. It is therefore the same for us."

Dalrymple feared a discussion of the question of religion. He did not answer the nun's last remark, but bowed politely. She, of course, could not see the inclination he made.

"You say nothing," she said presently. "Are you a Protestant?"

"Yes, Madam."

"It is a pity!" said Maria Addolorata. "May God send you light."

"Thank you, Madam."

Maria Addolorata smiled under her veil at the polite simplicity of the reply. She had met Englishmen in Rome.

"It is no longer customary to address us as 'Madam,'" she answered, a moment later. "It is more usual to speak to us as 'Sister' or 'Reverend Sister'—or 'Sister Maria.' I am Sister Maria Addolorata. But you know it, for you sent your message to me."

"Doctor Taddei told me.

At this point the portress appeared in the distance, and Maria Addolorata, hearing footsteps, turned her head from Dalrymple, raising her veil a little, so that she could recognize the lay sister without showing her face to the young man.

"Let us go," she said, dropping her veil again, and beginning to walk on. "The sisters are warned."

Dalrymple followed her in silence and at a respectful distance, congratulating himself upon his extraordinary good fortune in having got so far on the first attempt, and inwardly praying that Sor Tommaso's wounds might take a considerable time in healing. It had all come about so naturally that he had lost the sensation of doing something adventurous which had at first taken possession of him, and he now regarded everything as possible, even to being invited to a friendly cup of tea in Sister Maria Addolorata's sitting-room; for he imagined her as having a sitting-room and as drinking tea there in a semi-luxurious privacy. The idea would have amused an Italian of those days, when tea was looked upon as medicine.

They reached the end of the last corridor. Dalrymple, like Sor Tommaso, was admitted to the antechamber, while the portress waited outside to conduct him back again. But Maria did not take him into the abbess's parlour, into which she went at once, closing the door behind her. Dalrymple sat down upon a carved wooden box-bench, and waited. The nun was gone a long time.

"I have kept you waiting," she said, as she entered the little room again.

"My time is altogether at your service, Sister Maria Addolorata," he answered, rising quickly. "How is her most reverend excellency?"

"Very ill. I do not know what to say. She

will not hear of seeing you. I fear she will not live long, for she can hardly breathe."

"Does she cough?"

"Not much. Not so much as last night. She complains that she cannot draw her breath and that her lungs feel full of something."

The case was evidently serious, and Dalrymple, who was a physician by nature, proceeded to extract as much information as he could from the nun, who did her best to answer all his questions clearly. The long conversation, with its little restraints and its many attempts at a mutual understanding, did more to accustom Maria Addolorata to Dalrymple's presence and personality than any number of polite speeches on his part could have done. There is an unavoidable tendency to intimacy between any two people who are together engaged in taking care of a sick person.

"I can give you directions and good advice," said Dalrymple, at last. "But it can never be the same as though I could see the patient myself. Is there no possible means of obtaining her consent? She may die for the want of just such advice as I can only give after seeing her. Would not her brother, his Eminence the Cardinal, perhaps recommend her to let me visit her once?"

"That is an idea," answered the nun, quickly. "My uncle is a man of broad views. I have heard

it said in Rome. I could write to him that Doctor Taddei is unable to come, and that a celebrated foreign physician is here —"

"Not celebrated," interrupted Dalrymple, with his literal Scotch veracity.

"What difference can it make?" uttered Maria Addolorata, moving her shoulders a little impatiently. "He will be the more ready to use his influence, for he is much attached to my aunt. Then, if he can persuade her, I can send down the gardener to the town for you this afternoon. It may not be too late."

"I see that you have some confidence in me," said Dalrymple. "I am of a newer school than Doctor Taddei. If you will follow my directions, I will almost promise that her most reverend excellency shall not die before to-morrow."

He smiled now, as he gave the abbess her full title, for he began to feel as though he had known Maria Addolorata for a long time, though he had only had one glimpse of her eyes, just when she had raised her head to get a look at him through the loophole of the gate. But he had not forgotten them, and he felt that he knew them.

"I will do all you tell me," she answered quietly.

Dalrymple had some English medicines with him on his travels, and not knowing what might be required of him at the convent, he had brought with him a couple of tiny bottles.

"This when she coughs — ten drops," he said, handing the bottles to the nun. "And five drops of this once an hour, until her chest feels freer."

He gave her minute directions, as far as he could, about the general treatment of the patient, which Maria repeated and got by heart.

"I will let you know before twenty-three o'clock what the cardinal says to the plan," she said. "In this way you will be able to come up by daylight."

As Dalrymple took his leave, he held out his hand, forgetting that he was in Italy.

"It is not our custom," said Maria Addolorata, thrusting each of her own hands into the opposite sleeve.

But there was nothing cold in her tone. On the contrary, Dalrymple fancied that she was almost on the point of laughing at that moment, and he blushed at his awkwardness. But she could not see his face.

"Your most humble servant," he said, bowing to her.

"Good day, Signor Doctor," she answered, through the open door, as the portress jingled her keys and prepared to follow Dalrymple.

So he took his departure, not without much satisfaction at the result of his first attempt.

CHAPTER VII.

Sor Tommaso recovered but slowly, though his injuries were of themselves not dangerous. His complexion was apoplectic and gouty, he was no longer young, and before forty-eight hours had gone by his wounds were decidedly inflamed and he had a little fever. At the same time he was by no means a courageous man, and he was ready to cry out that he was dead, whenever he felt himself worse. Besides this, he lost his temper several times daily with Dalrymple, who resolutely refused to bleed him, and he insisted upon eating and drinking more than was good for him, at a time when if he had been his own patient he would have enforced starvation as necessary to recovery.

Meanwhile the cardinal had exerted his influence with his sister, the abbess, and had so far succeeded that Dalrymple, who went every day to the convent, was now made to stand with his back to the abbess's open door, in order that he might at least ask her questions and hear her own answers. Many an old Italian doctor can tell of even stranger and more absurd precautions observed by the nuns of those days. As soon as the oral

examination was over, Maria Addolorata shut the door and came out into the parlour, where Dalrymple finished his visit, prolonging it in conversation with her by every means he could devise.

Though encumbered with a little of the northern shyness, Dalrymple was not diffident. There is a great difference between shyness and diffidence. Diffidence distrusts itself; shyness distrusts the mere outward impression made on others. At this time Dalrymple had no object beyond enjoying the pleasure of talking with Maria Addolorata, and no hope beyond that of some day seeing her face without the veil. As for her voice, his present position as doctor to the convent made it foolish for him to run the risk of being caught listening for her songs behind the garden wall. But he had not forgotten what Annetta had told him, and Maria Addolorata's soft intonations and liquid depths of tone in speaking led him to believe that the peasant girl had not exaggerated the nun's gift of singing.

One day, after he had seen her and talked with her more than half a dozen times, he approached the subject, merely for the sake of conversation, saying that he had been told of her beautiful voice by people who had heard her across the garden.

"It is true," she answered simply. "I have a good voice. But it is forbidden here to sing except in church," she added with a sigh. "And now

that my aunt is ill, I would not displease her for anything."

"That is natural," said Dalrymple. "But I would give anything in the world to hear you."

"In church you can hear me. The church is open on Sundays at the Benediction service. We are behind the altar in the choir, of course. But perhaps you would know my voice from the rest because it is deeper."

"I should know it in a hundred thousand," asseverated the Scotchman, with warmth.

"That would be a great many — a whole choir of angels!" And the nun laughed softly, as she sometimes did, now that she knew him so much better.

There was something warm and caressing in her laughter, short and low as it was, that made Dalrymple look at those full white hands of hers and wonder whether they might not be warm and caressing too.

"Will you sing a little louder than the rest next Sunday afternoon, Sister Maria?" he asked. "I will be in the church."

"That would be a great sin," she answered, but not very gravely.

"Why?"

"Because I should have to be thinking about you instead of about the holy service. Do you not know that? But nothing is sinful according

to you Protestants, I suppose. At all events, come to the church."

"Do you think we are all devils, Sister Maria?" asked Dalrymple, with a smile.

"More or less." She laughed again. "They say in the town that you have a compact with the devil."

"Do you hear what is said in the town?"

"Sometimes. The gardener brings the gossip and tells it to the cook. Or Sora Nanna tells it to me when she brings the linen. There are a thousand ways. The people think we know nothing because they never see us. But we hear all that goes on."

Dalrymple said nothing in answer for some time. Then he spoke suddenly and rather hoarsely.

"Shall I never see you, Sister Maria?" he asked.

"Me? But you see me every day —"

"Yes, — but your face, without the veil."

Maria Addolorata shook her head.

"It is against all rules," she answered.

"Is it not against all rules that we should sit here and make conversation every day for half an hour?"

"Yes — I suppose it is. But you are here as a doctor to take care of my aunt," she added quickly. "That makes it right. You are not a man. You are a doctor."

"Oh, — I understand." Dalrymple laughed a little. "Then I am never to see your beautiful face?"

"How do you know it is beautiful, since you have never seen it?"

"From your beautiful hands," answered the young man, promptly.

"Oh!" Maria Addolorata glanced at her hands and then, with a movement which might have been quicker, concealed them in her sleeves.

"It is a sin to hide what God has made beautiful," said Dalrymple.

"If I have anything about me that is beautiful, it is for God's glory that I hide it," answered Maria, with real gravity this time.

Dalrymple understood that he had gone a little too far, though he did not exactly regret it, for the next words she spoke showed him that she was not really offended. Nevertheless, in order to exhibit a proper amount of contrition he took his leave with a little more formality than usual on this particular occasion. Possibly she was willing to show that she forgave him, for she hesitated a moment just before opening the door, and then, to his great surprise, held out her hand to him.

"It is your custom," she said, just touching his eagerly outstretched fingers. "But you must not look at it," she added, drawing it back quickly and hiding it in her sleeve with another low laugh. And she began to shut the door almost before he had quite gone through.

Dalrymple walked more slowly on that day, as

he descended through the steep and narrow streets, and though he was surefooted by nature and habit, he almost stumbled once or twice on his way down, because, somehow, though his eyes looked towards his feet, he did not see exactly where he was going.

There is no necessity for analyzing his sensations. It is enough to say at once that he was beginning to be really in love with Maria Addolorata, and that he denied the fact to himself stoutly, though it forced itself upon him with every step which took him further from the convent. He felt on that day a strong premonitory symptom in the shape of a logical objection, as it were, to his returning again to see the nun. The objection was the evident and total futility of the almost intimate intercourse into which the two were gliding. The day must soon come when the abbess would no longer need his assistance. In all probability she would recover, for the more alarming symptoms had disappeared, and she showed signs of regaining her strength by slow degrees. It was quite clear to Dalrymple that, after her ultimate recovery, his chance of seeing and talking with Maria Addolorata would be gone forever. Sor Tommaso, indeed, recovered but slowly. Of the two his case was the worse, for fever had set in on the third day and had not left him yet, so that he assured Dalrymple almost hourly that his last moment was at hand.

But he also was sure to get well, in the Scotchman's opinion, and the latter knew well enough that his own temporary privileges as physician to the convent would be withdrawn from him as soon as the Subiaco doctor should be able to climb the hill.

It was all, therefore, but a brief incident in his life, which could not possibly have any continuation hereafter. He tried in vain to form plans and create reasons for seeing Maria Addolorata even once a month for some time to come, but his ingenuity failed him altogether, and he grew angry with himself for desiring what was manifestly impossible.

With true masculine inconsequence, so soon as he was displeased with himself he visited his displeasure upon the object that attracted him, and on the earliest possible occasion, on their very next meeting. He assumed an air of coldness and reserve such as he had certainly not thought necessary to put on at his first visit. Almost without any preliminary words of courtesy, and without any attempt to prolong the short conversation which always took place before he was made to stand with his back to the abbess's open door, he coldly inquired about the good lady's condition during the past night, and made one or two observations thereon with a brevity almost amounting to curtness.

Maria Addolorata was surprised; but as her face was covered, and her hands were quietly folded before her, Dalrymple could not see that his behaviour had any effect upon her. She did not answer his last remark at all, but quietly bowed her head.

Then followed the usual serio-comic scene, during which Dalrymple stood turned away from the open door, asking questions of the sick woman, and listening attentively for her low-spoken answers. To tell the truth, he judged of her condition more from the sound of her voice than from anything else. He had also taught Maria Addolorata how to feel the pulse; and she counted the beats while he looked at his watch. His chief anxiety was now for the action of the heart, which had been weakened by a lifetime of unhealthy living, by food inadequate in quality, even when sufficient in quantity, by confinement within doors, and lack of life-giving sunshine, and by all those many causes which tend to reduce the vitality of a cloistered nun.

When the comedy was over, Maria Addolorata shut the door as usual; and she and Dalrymple were alone together in the abbess's parlour, as they were every day. The abbess herself could hear that they were talking, but she naturally supposed that they were discussing the details of her condition; and as she felt that she was really

recovering, so far as she could judge, and as almost every day, after Dalrymple had gone, Maria Addolorata had some new direction of his to carry out, the elder lady's suspicions were not aroused. On the contrary, her confidence in the Scotch doctor grew from day to day; and in the long hours during which she lay thinking over her state and its circumstances, she made plans for his conversion, in which her brother, the cardinal, bore a principal part. She was grateful to Dalrymple, and it seemed to her that the most proper way of showing her gratitude would be to save his soul, a point of view unusual in the ordinary relations of life.

On this particular day, Maria Addolorata shut the door, and came forward into the parlour as usual. As usual, too, she sat down in the abbess's own big easy-chair, expecting that Dalrymple would seat himself opposite to her. But he remained standing, with the evident intention of going away in a few moments. He said a few words about the patient, gave one or two directions, and then stood still in silence for a moment.

Maria Addolorata lifted her head a little, but not enough to show him more than an inch of her face.

"Have I displeased you, Signor Doctor?" she asked, in her deep, warm voice. "Have I not carried out your orders?"

"On the contrary," answered Dalrymple, with a stiffness which he resented in himself. "It is impossible to be more conscientious than you always are."

Seeing that he still remained standing, the nun rose to her feet, and waited for him to go. She believed that she was far too proud to detain him, if he wished to shorten the meeting. But something hurt her, which she could not understand.

Dalrymple hesitated a moment, and his lips parted as though he were about to speak. The silence was prolonged only for a moment or two.

"Good morning, Sister Maria Addolorata," he said suddenly, and bowed.

"Good morning, Signor Doctor," answered the nun.

She bent her head very slightly, but a keener observer than Dalrymple was, just then, would have noticed that as she did so, her shoulders moved forward a little, as though her breast were contracted by some sudden little pain. Dalrymple did not see it. He bowed again, let himself out, and closed the door softly behind him.

When he was gone, Maria Addolorata sat down in the big easy-chair again, and uncovered her face, doubling her veil back upon her head, and withdrawing the thick folds from her chin and mouth. Her features were very pale, as she sat staring at the sky through the window, and her

eyes fixed themselves in that look which was peculiar to her. Her full white hands strained upon each other a little, bringing the colour to the tips of her fingers. During some minutes she did not move. Then she heard her aunt's voice calling to her hoarsely. She rose at once, and went into the bedroom. The abbess's pale face was very thin and yellow now, as it lay upon the white pillow; the coverlet was drawn up to her chin, and a grimly carved black crucifix hung directly above her head.

"The doctor did not stay long to-day," she said, in a hollow tone.

"No, mother," answered the young nun. "He thinks you are doing very well. He wishes you to eat a wing of roast chicken."

"If I could have a little salad," said the abbess. "Maria," she added suddenly, "you are careful to keep your face covered when you are in the next room, are you not?"

"Always."

"You generally do not raise your veil until you come into this room, after the doctor is gone," said the elder lady.

"He went so soon, to-day," answered Maria Addolorata, with perfectly innocent truth. "I stayed a moment in the parlour, thinking over his directions, and I lifted my veil when I was alone. It is close to-day."

"Go into the garden, and walk a little," said the abbess. "It will do you good. You are pale."

If she had felt even a faint uneasiness about her niece's conduct, it was removed by the latter's manner.

CHAPTER VIII.

Once more Dalrymple was sitting over his supper at the table in the vaulted room on the ground floor which Stefanone used as a wine shop. To tell the truth, it was very superior to the ordinary wine shops of Subiaco and had an exceptional reputation. The common people never came there, because Stefanone did not sell his cheap wine at retail, but sent it all to Rome, or took it thither himself for the sake of getting a higher price for it. He always said that he did not keep an inn, and perhaps as much on account of his relations with Gigetto's family, he assumed as far as possible the position of a wine-dealer rather than that of a wine-seller. The distinction, in Italian mountain towns, is very marked.

"They can have a measure of the best, if they care to pay for it," he said. "If they wish a mouthful of food, there is what there is. But I am not the village host, and Nanna is not a wine-shop cook, to fry tripe and peel onions for Titius and Caius."

The old Roman expression, denoting generally the average public, survives still in polite society, and Stefanone had caught it from Sor Tommaso.

Dalrymple was sitting as usual over his supper, by the light of the triple-beaked brass lamp, his measure of wine beside him, and a beefsteak, which on this occasion was really of beef, before him. Stefanone was absent in Rome, with a load of wine. Sora Nanna sat on Dalrymple's right, industriously knitting in Italian fashion, one of the needles stuck into and supported by a wooden sheath thrust into her waist-band, while she worked off the stitches with the others. Annetta sat opposite the Scotchman, but a little on one side of the lamp, so that she could see his face.

"Mother," she said suddenly, without lifting her chin from the hand in which it rested, "you do not know anything! This Signor Englishman is making love with a nun in the convent! Eh — what do you think of it? Only this was wanting. A little more and the lightning will fall upon the convent! These Protestants! Oh, these blessed Protestants! They respect nothing, not even the saints!"

"My daughter! what are you saying?"

Sora Nanna's fingers did not pause in their work, nor did her eyes look up, but the deep furrow showed itself in her thick peasant's forehead, and her coarse, hard lips twitched clumsily with the beginning of a smile.

"What am I saying? The truth. Ask rather of the Signore whether it is not true."

"It is silly," said Dalrymple, growing unnaturally red, and looking up sharply at Annetta, before he took his next mouthful.

"Look at him, mother!" laughed the girl. "He is red, red — he seems to me a boiled shrimp. Eh, this time I have guessed it! And as for Sister Maria Addolorata, she no longer sees with her eyes! To-day, when you were carrying in the baskets, you and the other women who went with us, I asked her whether the abbess was satisfied with the new doctor, and she answered that he was a very wise man, much wiser than Sor Tommaso. So I told her that it was a pity, because Sor Tommaso was getting well and would not allow the English doctor to come instead of him much longer. Then she looked at me. By Bacchus, I was afraid. Certain eyes! Not even a cat when you take away her kittens! A little more and she would have eaten me. And then her face made itself of marble — like that face of a woman that is built into the fountain in the piazza. Arch-priest! What a face!"

The girl stared hard at Dalrymple, and her mouth laughed wickedly at his evident embarrassment, while there was something very different from laughter in her eyes. During the long speech, Sora Nanna had stopped knitting, and she looked from her daughter to the Scotchman with a sort of half-stupid, half-cunning curiosity.

"But these are sins!" she exclaimed at last.

"And what does it matter?" asked the girl. "Does he go to confession? So what does it matter? He keeps the account himself, of his sins. I should not like to have them on my shoulders. But as for Sister Maria Addolorata — oh, she! I told you that she sinned in her throat. Well, the sin is ready, now. What is she waiting for? For the abbess to die? Or for Sor Tommaso to get well? Then she will not see the Signor Englishman any more. It would be better for her. When she does not see him any more, she will knead her pillow with tears, and make her bread of it, to bite and eat. Good appetite, Sister Maria!"

"You talk, you talk, and you conclude nothing," observed Sora Nanna. "You have certain thoughts in your head! And you do not let the Signore say even a word."

"What can he say? He will say that it is not true. But then, who will believe him? I should like to see them a little together. I am sure that she shows him her face, and that it is 'Signor Doctor' here, and 'Dear Signor Doctor' there, and a thousand gentlenesses. Tell the truth, Signore. She shows you her face."

"No," said Dalrymple, who had regained his self-possession. "She never shows me her face."

"What a shame for a Carmelite nun to show her face to a man!" cried the girl.

"But I tell you she is always veiled to her chin," insisted Dalrymple, with perfect truth.

"Eh! It is you who say so!" retorted Annetta. "But then, what can it matter to me? Make love with a nun, if it goes, Signore. Youth is a flower — when it is withered, it is hay, and the beasts eat it."

"This is true," said Sora Nanna, returning to her knitting. "But do not pay attention to her, Signore. She is stupid. She does not know what she says. Eat, drink, and manage your own affairs. It is better. What can a child understand? It is like a little dog that sees and barks, without understanding. But you are a much instructed man and have been round the whole world. Therefore you know many things. It seems natural."

Though Dalrymple was not diffident, as has been said, he was far from vain, on the whole, and in particular he had none of that contemptible vanity which makes a man readily believe that every woman he meets is in love with him. He had not the slightest idea at that time that Annetta, the peasant girl, looked upon him with anything more than the curiosity and vague interest usually bestowed on a foreigner in Italy.

He was annoyed, however, by what she said this evening, though he was also secretly surprised and delighted. The contradiction is a common one. The miser is half mad with joy on discovering that

he has much more than he supposed, and bitterly resents, at the same time, any notice which may be taken of the fact by others.

Annetta did not enjoy his discomfiture and evident embarrassment, for she was far more deeply hurt herself than she realized, and every word she had spoken about Maria Addolorata had hurt her, though she had taken a sort of vague delight in teasing Dalrymple. She relapsed into silence now, alternately wishing that he loved her, and then, that she might kill him. If she could not have his heart, she would be satisfied with his blood. There was a passionate animal longing in the instinct to have him for herself, even dead, rather than that any other woman should get his love.

Dalrymple was aware only that the girl's words had annoyed him, while inwardly conscious that if what she said were true, the truth would make a difference in his life. He showed no inclination to talk any more, and finished his supper in a rather morose silence, turning to his book as soon as he had done. Then Gigetto came in with his guitar and sang and talked with the two women.

But he was restless that night, and did not fall asleep until the moon had set and his window grew dark. And even in his dreams he was restless still, so that when he awoke in the morning he said to himself that he had been foolish in his behaviour towards Maria Addolorata on the previous day.

He felt tired, too, and his colour was less brilliant than usual. It was Sunday, and he remembered that if he chose he could go in the afternoon to the Benediction in the convent church and hear Maria's voice perhaps. But at the usual hour, just before noon, he went to make his visit to the abbess.

It was his intention to forget his stiff manner, and to behave as he had always behaved until yesterday. Strange to say, however, he felt a constraint coming upon him as soon as he was in the nun's presence. She received him as usual, there was the usual comic scene at the abbess's door, and, as every day, the two were alone together after her door was shut.

"Are you ill?" asked Maria Addolorata, after a moment's silence which, short as it was, both felt to be awkward.

Dalrymple was taken by surprise. The tone in which she had spoken was cold and distant rather than expressive of any concern for his welfare, but he did not think of that. He only realized that his manner must seem to her very unusual, since she asked such a question. An Italian would have observed that his own face was pale, and would have told her that he was dying of love.

"No, I am not ill," answered the Scotchman, simply, and in his most natural tone of voice.

"Then what is the matter with you since yester-

day?" asked Maria Addolorata, less coldly, and as though she were secretly amused.

"There is nothing the matter — at least, nothing that I could explain to you."

She sat down in the big easy-chair and, as formerly, he took his seat opposite to her.

"There is something," she insisted, speaking thoughtfully. "You cannot deceive a woman, Signor Doctor."

Dalrymple smiled and looked at her veiled head.

"You said the other day that I was not a man, but a doctor," he answered. "I suppose I might answer that you are not a woman, but a nun."

"And is not a nun a woman?" asked Maria Addolorata, and he knew that she was smiling, too.

"You would not forgive me if I answered you," he said.

"Who knows? I might be obliged to, since I am obliged to meet you every day. It may be a sin, but I am curious."

"Shall I tell you?"

As though instinctively, Maria was silent for a moment, and turned her veiled face towards the abbess's door. But Dalrymple needed no such warning to lower his voice.

"Tell me," she said, and under her veil she could feel that her eyes were growing deep and the pupils wide and dark, and she knew that she had done wrong.

"How should I know whether you are a saint or only a woman, since I have never seen your face?" he asked. "I shall never know — for in a few days Doctor Taddei will be well again, and you will not need my services."

He saw the quick tightening of one hand upon the other, and the slight start of the head, and in a flash he knew that all Annetta had told him was true. The silence that followed seemed longer than the awkward pause which had preceded the conversation.

"It cannot be so soon," she said in a very low tone.

"It may be to-morrow," he answered, and to his own astonishment his voice almost broke in his throat, and he felt that his own hands were twisting each other, as though he were in pain. "I shall die without seeing you," he added almost roughly.

Again there was a short silence in the still room.

Suddenly, with quick movements of both hands at once, Maria Addolorata threw back the veil from her face, and drew away the folds that covered her mouth.

"There, see me!" she exclaimed. "Look at me well this once!"

Her face was as white as marble, and her dark eyes had a wild and startled look in them, as though she saw the world for the first time. A

ringlet of red-gold hair had escaped from the bands of white that crossed her forehead in an even line and were drawn down straight on either side, for in the quick movement she had made she had loosened the pin that held them together under her chin, and had freed the dazzling throat down to the high collar.

Dalrymple's pale, bright blue eyes caught fire, and he looked at her with all his being, at her face, her throat, her eyes, the ringlet of her hair. He breathed audibly, with parted lips, between his clenched teeth.

Gradually, as he looked, he saw the red blush rise from the throat to the cheeks, from the cheeks to the forehead, and the marble grew more beautiful with womanly life. Then, all at once, he saw the hot tears welling up in her eyes, and in an instant the vision was gone. With a passionate movement she had covered her face with the veil, and throwing herself sideways against the high back of the chair, she pressed the dark stuff still closer to her eyes and mouth and cheeks. Her whole body shook convulsively, and a moment later she was sobbing, not audibly, but visibly, as though her heart were breaking.

Dalrymple was again taken by surprise. He had been so completely lost in the utterly selfish contemplation of her beauty that he had been very far from realizing what she herself must have felt as

soon as she appreciated what she had done. He at once accused himself of having looked too rudely at her, but at the same time he was himself too much disturbed to argue the matter. Quite instinctively he rose to his feet and tried to take one of her hands from her veil, touching it comfortingly. But she made a wild gesture, as though to drive him away.

"Go!" she cried in a low and broken voice, between her sobs. "Go! Go quickly!"

She could not say more for her sobbing, but he did not obey her. He only drew back a little and watched her, all his blood on fire from the touch of her soft white hand.

She stifled her sobs in her veil, and gradually grew more calm. She even arranged the veil itself a little better, her face still turned away towards the back of the chair.

"Maria! Maria!" The abbess's voice was calling her, hoarsely and almost desperately, from the next room.

She started and sat up straight, listening. Then the cry was heard again, more desperate, less loud. With a quick skill which seemed marvellous in Dalrymple's eyes, Maria adjusted her veil almost before she had sprung to her feet.

"Wait!" she said. "Something is the matter!"

She was at the bedroom door in an instant, and in an instant more she was at her aunt's bedside.

"Maria — I am dying," said the abbess's voice faintly, as she felt the nun's arm under her head.

Dalrymple heard the words, and did not hesitate as he hastily felt for something in his pocket.

"Come!" cried Maria Addolorata.

But he was already there, on the other side of the bed, pouring something between the sick lady's lips.

It was fortunate that he was there at that moment. He had indeed anticipated the possibility of a sudden failure in the action of the heart, and he never came to the convent without a small supply of a powerful stimulant of his own invention. The liquid, however, was of such a nature that he did not like to leave the use of it to Maria Addolorata's discretion, for he was aware that she might easily be mistaken in the symptoms of the collapse which would really require its use.

The abbess swallowed a sufficient quantity of it, and Dalrymple allowed her head to lie again upon the pillow. She looked almost as though she were dead. Her eyes were turned up, and her jaw had dropped. Maria Addolorata believed that all was over.

"She is dead," she said. "Let us leave her in peace."

It is a very ancient custom among Italians to withdraw as soon as a dying person is unconscious, if not even before the supreme moment.

"She will probably live through this," answered Dalrymple, shaking his head.

Neither he nor the nun spoke again for a long time. Little by little, the abbess revived under the influence of the stimulant, the heart beat less faintly, and the mouth slowly closed, while the eyelids shut themselves tightly over the upturned eyes. The normal regular breathing began again, and the crisis was over.

"It is passed," said Dalrymple. "It will not come again to-day. We can leave her now, for she will sleep."

"Yes," said the abbess herself. "Let me sleep." Her voice was faint, but the words were distinctly articulated.

Then she opened her eyes and looked about her quite naturally. Her glance rested on Dalrymple's face. Suddenly realizing that she was not veiled, she drew the coverlet up over her face. It is a peculiarity of such cases, that the patient returns almost immediately to ordinary consciousness when the moment of danger is past.

"Go!" she said, with more energy than might have been expected. "This is a religious house. You must not be here."

Dalrymple retired into the parlour again, shutting the door behind him, and waited for Maria Addolorata, for it was now indispensable that he should give her directions for the night. During

the few minutes which passed while he was alone, he stood looking out of the window. The excitement of the last half-hour had cut off from his present state of mind the emotion he had felt before the abbess's cry for help, but had not decreased the impression it had left. While he was helping the sick lady there had not been one instant in which he had not felt that there was more than the life of a half-saintly old woman in the balance, and that her death meant the end of his meetings with Maria Addolorata. Annetta's words came back to him, 'she will knead her pillow with tears and make her bread of it.'

Several minutes passed, and the door opened softly and closed again. Maria Addolorata came up to him, where he stood by the window. She did not speak for a moment, but he saw that her hand was pressed to her side.

"I have spent a bad half-hour," she said at last, with something like a gasp.

"It is the worst half-hour I ever spent in my life," answered Dalrymple. "I thought it was all over," he added.

"Yes," she said, "I thought it was all over."

He could hear his heart beating in his ears. He could almost hear hers. His hand went out toward her, cold and unsteady, but it fell to his side again almost instantly. But for the heart-beats, it seemed to him that there was an appalling stillness in the

air of the quiet room. His manly face grew very pale. He slowly bit his lip and looked out of the window. An enormous temptation was upon him. He knew that if she moved to leave his side he should take her and hold her. There was a tiny drop of blood on his lip now. Something in him made him hope against himself that she would speak, that she would say some insignificant dry words. But every inch of his strong fibre and every ounce of his hot blood hoped that she would move, instead of speaking.

She sighed, and the sigh was broken by a quick-drawn breath. Slowly Dalrymple turned his white face and gleaming eyes to her veiled head. Still she neither spoke nor moved. He, in memory, saw her face, her mouth, and her eyes through the thick stuff that hid them. The silence became awful to him. His hands opened and shut convulsively.

She heard his breath and she saw the uncertain shadow of his hand, moving on the black and white squares of the pavement. She made a slight, short movement towards him and then stepped suddenly back, overcoming the temptation to go to him.

"No!"

He uttered the single word with a low, fierce cry. In an instant his arms were around her, pressing her, lifting her, straining her, almost bruising her. In an instant his lips were kissing a face whiter than his own, eyes that flamed like summer light-

ning between his kisses, lips crushed and hurt by his, but still not kissed enough, hands that were raised to resist, but lingered to be kissed in turn, lest anything should be lost.

A little splintering crash, the sound of a glass falling upon a stone floor in the next room, broke the stillness. Dalrymple's arms relaxed, and the two stood for one moment facing one another, pale, with fire in their eyes and hearts beating more loudly than before. Dalrymple raised his hand to his forehead, as though he were dazed, and made an uncertain step in the direction of the door. Maria raised her white hands towards him, and her eyelids drooped, even while she looked into his face.

He kissed her once more with a kiss in which all other kisses seemed to meet and live and die a lingering, sweet death. She sank into the deep old easy-chair, and when she looked up, he was gone.

CHAPTER IX.

It rained during the afternoon, and Dalrymple sat in his small laboratory, among his books and the simple apparatus he used for his experiments. His little window was closed, and the southwest wind drove the shower against the clouded panes of glass, so that the rain came through the ill-fitted strips of lead which joined them, and ran down in small streams to the channel in the stone sill, whence the water found its way out through a hole running through the wall. He sat in his rush-bottomed chair, sideways by the deal table, one long leg crossed over the other. His hand lay on an open book, and his fingers occasionally tapped the page impatiently, while his eyes were fixed on the window, watching the driving rain.

He was not thinking, for he could not think. Over and over again the scene of the morning came back to him and sent the hot blood rushing to his throat. He tried to reflect, indeed, and to see whether what he had done was to have any consequences for him, or was to be left behind in his life, like a lovely view seen from a carriage window on a swift journey, gone before it is half seen, and

never to be seen again, except in dreams. But he was utterly unable to look forward and reason about the future. Everything dragged him back, up the steep ascent to the convent, through the arched ways and vaulted corridors, to the room in which he had passed the supreme moments of his life. The only distinct impression of the future was the strong desire to feel again what he had felt that day; to feel it again and again, and always, as long as feeling could last; to stretch out his hands and take, to close them and hold, to make his, indubitably, what had been but questionably his for an instant, to get the one thing worth having, for himself, and only for himself. For the passion of a strong man is loving and taking, and the passion of a good woman is loving and giving. Dalrymple reasoned well enough, later, — too well, perhaps, — but during those hours he spent alone on that day, there was no power of reasoning in him. The world was the woman he loved, and the world's orbit was but the circle of his clasping arms. Beyond them was chaos, without form and void, clouded as the rain-streaked panes of his little window.

He looked at his watch more than once. At last he rose, threw a cloak over his shoulders and went out, locking the door of the little laboratory behind him as he always did, and thrusting the unwieldy key into his pocket.

He climbed the hill to the convent, taking the short cut through the narrow lanes. The rain had almost ceased, and the wet mist that blew round the corners of the dark houses was pleasant in his face. But he scarcely knew what he saw and felt on his way. He reached the convent church and went in, and stood by one of the pillars near the door.

It was a small church, built with a great choir for the nuns behind the high altar; from each side of the latter a high wooden screen extended to the walls, completely cutting off the space. It was dark, too, especially in such weather, and almost deserted, save for a number of old women who knelt on the damp marble pavement, some leaning against the backs of chairs, some resting one arm upon the plastered bases of the yellow marble columns. There were many lights on the high altar. Two acolytes, rough-headed boys of Subiaco, knelt within the altar rail, dressed in black cassocks and clean linen cottas. Two priests and a young deacon sat side by side on the right of the altar, with small black books in their hands. The nuns were chanting, unseen in the choir. No one noticed Dalrymple, wrapped in his cloak, as he leaned against the pillar near the door. His head was a little inclined, involuntarily respectful to ceremonies he neither believed in nor understood, but which had in them the imposing element

of devout earnestness. Yet his eyes were raised and looked up from under his brows, steadily and watchfully, for he knew that Maria Addolorata was behind the screen, and from the first moment of entering the church it seemed to him that he could distinguish her voice from the rest.

He knew that it was hers, though he had never heard her sing. There was in all those sweet, colourless tones one tone that made ringing harmonies in his strong heart. Amongst all those mingling accents, there was one accent that touched his soul. Amidst the echoes that died softly away under the dim arches, there was one echo that died not, but rang on and on in his ears. There was a voice not like other voices there, nor like any he had ever heard. Many were strong and sweet; this one was not sweet and strong only, but alive with a divine life, winged with divine wings, essential of immortality, touching beyond tears, passionate as the living, breathing, sighing, dying world, grand as a flood of light, sad as the twilight of gods, full as a great water swinging to the tide of the summer's moon, fine-drawn as star-rays — a voice of gold.

As Dalrymple stood there in the shadow, he heard it singing to him and telling him all that he had not been told in words, all that he felt, and more also. For there was in it the passion of the woman, and the passionate remorse of the

nun, the towering love of Maria Braccio, woman and princess, and the deep despair of Maria Addolorata, nun and sinner, unfaithful spouse of the Lord Christ, accused and self-accusing, self-wronged, self-judged, but condemned of God and foretasting the ultimate tragedy that is eternal — the tragedy of supreme hell.

The man who stood there knew that it was his doing, and the burden of his deeds bowed him bodily as he stood. But still he listened, and, as she sung, he watched her lips in the dark, inner mirror of sin's memory, and they drew him on.

Little by little, he heard only her voice, and the others chanted but faintly as from an infinite distance. And then, not in his thought, but in deed, she was singing alone, and the words of 'O Salutaris Hostia,' sounded in the dim church as they had never sounded before, nor could ever sound again, the appeal of a lost soul's agony to God, the glory of golden voice, the accent of transcendent genius, the passion, the strength, the despair, of an ancient race.

In the dark church the coarse, sad peasant women bowed themselves upon the pavement. One of them sobbed aloud and beat her breast. Angus Dalrymple kneeled upon one knee and pressed his brow against the foot of the pillar, kneeling neither to God, nor to the Sacred Host, nor to man's belief in Heaven or Hell, neither

praying nor blaspheming, neither hoping nor dreading, but spell-bound upon a wrack of torture that was heart-breaking delight, his senses torn and strained to the utmost of his strong endurance, to the very scream of passion, his soul crucified upon the exquisite loveliness of his sin.

Then all was still for an instant. Again there was a sound of voices, as the nuns sang in chorus the 'Tantum Ergo.' But the voice of voices was silent among them. The solemn Benediction blessed the just and the unjust alike. The short verses and responses of the priests broke the air that still seemed alive and trembling.

Dalrymple rose slowly, and wrapped his cloak about him. Above the footsteps of the women going out of the church, he could hear the soft sound of all the nuns moving together as they left the choir. He knew that she was with them, and he stood motionless in his place till silence descended as a curtain between him and what had been. Then, with bent head, he went out into the rain that poured through the dim twilight.

CHAPTER X.

They were together on the following day. The abbess was better, and as yet there had been no return of the syncope which Dalrymple dreaded.

Contrary to her habit, Maria Addolorata sat on a high chair by the table, her head veiled and turned away, her chin supported in her hand. Dalrymple was seated not far from her, leaning forward, and trying to see her face, silent, and in a dangerous mood. She had refused to let him come near her, and even to raise her veil. When she spoke, her voice was full of a profound sadness that irritated him instead of touching him, for his nerves were strung to passion and out of tune with regret.

"The sin of it; the deadly sin!" she said.

"There is no sin in it," he answered; but she shook her veiled head.

And there was silence again, as on the day before, but the stillness was of another kind. It was not the awful lull which goes before the bursting of the storm, when the very air seems to start at the fall of a leaf for fear lest it be already the thunder-clap. It was more like the noiseless rising of the hungry flood that creeps up round the

doomed house, wherein is desperate, starving life, higher and higher, inch by inch—the flood of rising fate.

"You say that there is no sin in it," she said, after a time. "You say it, but you do not think it. You are a man—you have honour to lose—you understand that, at least—"

"You are a woman, and you have humanity's right to be free. It is an honourable right. You gave it up when you took that veil, not knowing what it was that you gave up. You have done no wrong. You have done nothing that any loving maiden need be ashamed of. I kissed you, for you could not help yourself. That is the monstrous crime which you say is to be punished with eternal damnation. It is monstrous that you should think so. It is blasphemy to say that God made woman to lead a life of suffering and daily misery, chained to a cross which it is agony to look at, and shame to break from."

"Go—leave me. You are tempting me again." She spoke away from him, not changing her position.

"If truth is temptation, I am tempting you, for I am showing you the truth. The truth is this. When you were almost a child they began to bend you and break you in the way they wanted you to grow. You bent, but you were not broken. Your nature is too strong. There is a life of your own

in you. It was against your will, and when you were just grown up, they buried you, your beauty, your youth, your fresh young heart, your voice and your genius—for it is nothing less. It was all done with deliberate intention for the glory of your family, blasphemously asserted to be the glory of God. It was pressed upon you, before you knew what you were doing, and made pleasant to you before you knew what it all meant. Your cross was cushioned for you and your crown of thorns was gilded. They made the seat under the canopy seem a seat in heaven. They even made you believe that the management of two or three score suffering women was government and power. It seemed a great thing to be abbess, did it not?"

Maria 'Addolorata bent her veiled head slowly twice or three times, in a heavy-hearted way.

"They made you believe all that," continued Dalrymple, with cold earnestness, "and much more besides—a great deal of which I know little, I suppose—the life to come, and saintship, and the glories of heaven. You have found out what it is all worth. We have found it out together. And they frightened you with hell. Do you know what hell is? A life without love, when one knows what love can mean. I am not eloquent; I wish I were. But I am plain, and I can tell you the truth."

"It is not the truth," answered the nun, slowly.

"You tell me it is, to tempt me. I cannot drive you away by force. Will you not go? I cannot cry out for help — it would ruin me and you. Will you not leave me? But for God's grace, I am at your mercy, and there is little grace for me, a sinner."

"No, I will not go away," said Dalrymple, and it seemed to Maria that his voice was the voice of her fate.

"Then God have mercy!" she cried, in a low tone, and as her head sank forward, it was her forehead that rested in her right hand, instead of her chin.

"Love is more merciful than God," he answered.

There was a sudden softness in his voice which she had never heard, not even yesterday. Rising, he stole near to her, and standing, bent down and leaned upon the table by her side and spoke close to her ear. But he did not touch her. She could feel his breath through her veil when he spoke again. It was vital and fierce, and softly hot, like the breathing of a powerful wild beast.

"You are my God," he said. "I worship you, and adore you. But I must have you for mine always. I would rather kill you, and have no God, than lose you alive. Come with me. You are free. You can get through the garden at night — with good horses we can reach the sea to-morrow. There is an English ship of war at anchor in Civita

Vecchia. The officers are my friends. Before to-morrow night we can be safe — married — happy. No one will know — no one will follow us. Maria — come — come — come!"

His voice sank to a vibrating whisper as he repeated the word again and again, closer and closer to her ear. Her hands had dropped from her forehead and lay upon the table. With bent head she listened.

"Come, my darling," he continued, fast and low. "I have a beautiful home, my father's home, my mother's — your laws and vows are nothing to them. You shall be honoured, loved — ah, dear! adored, worshipped — you do not know what we will do for you, to fill your life with sweet things. All your life, Maria, from to-morrow. Instead of pain and penance and everlasting suffering and weariness, you shall have all that the world holds of love and peace and flowers. And you shall sing your whole heart out when you will, and have music to play with from year's beginning to year's end and year's end again. Sweet, let me tell you how I love you — how you are alive in every drop of my blood, beating through me like living fire, through heart and soul and head and hand — "

With a quick movement she pressed her palms against her veil upon her ears to shut out the sound of his words. She rocked herself a little, as though the pain were almost greater than she could

bear. But his hands moved too, stealthily, strongly, as a tiger's velvet feet, with a vibration all through them, to the very ends of his fingers. For he was in earnest. And the arm went softly round her, and closed gently upon her as her figure swayed in her chair; and the other sought hers, and found it cold as ice and trembling, and not strong to stop her hearing. And again she listened.

Wild and incoherent words fell from his lips, hot and low, with no reason in them but the overwhelming reason of love itself. For he was not an eloquent man, and now he took no thought of what he said. He was far too natural to be eloquent, and far too deeply stirred to care for the shape his love took in speech. There was in his words the strong rush of out-bursting truth which even the worst passion has when it is real to the roots. Words terrible and gentle, blasphemous and devout, wove themselves into a new language such as Maria Addolorata had never heard, nor dared to think of hearing. But he dared everything, to tell her, to hold her, against God and devil, heaven and earth, and all mankind. And he promised all he had, and all that was not his to promise nor to give, rending her beliefs to shreds, trampling on the broken fragments of all she had worshipped, tearing her chains link from link and scattering them like straw down the storm of passionate contempt. And then, again, pouring out love, and more love, and

love again, as a stream of liquid fire let loose to flood all it meets with dazzling destruction and hot death.

It is not every woman that knows what it is to be so loved and to listen to such words, so spoken. Those who have heard and felt can understand, but not the rest. Gradually as he spoke, her veiled face was drawn toward his; gradually her hand raised the thick veil and drew it back; and again a little, and the hand that had struggled long and silently against his, lay still at last, and the face that had appealed in vain to Heaven, hid itself against the heart of the strong man.

"The Lord have mercy upon my sinful soul!" she softly prayed.

"I love you!" whispered Dalrymple, folding her to him with both his arms, and pressing his lips to her head. "That is all the world holds. That is all the Heaven there is, and we have it for our own."

But presently she drew back from him, clinging to him with her hands as though to hold him, and yet separating from him and looking up into his face.

"And to-morrow?" she said, with a despairing question in her tone.

"We will go away to-night," he answered, "and to-morrow will be ours, too, and all the to-morrows after that."

But she shook her head, and her hands loosened their hold upon his arms, still lingering on his sleeves.

"And leave her to die?" she asked, with a quick glance at the abbess's door.

Then she looked at him, with something of sudden fear as she met his eyes again. And almost instantly she turned from him, and threw herself forward upon the table as she sat.

"The sin, the deadly sin!" she moaned. "Oh, the horror of it all — the sin, the shame, the disgrace! That is the worst to bear — the shame! The undying shame of it!"

Dalrymple's brows bent themselves in a heavy frown, for he was in no temper to be thwarted, desperate as the risk might be. For himself, he knew that he was setting his life on the chances, if she consented, and that life would not be worth having if she refused. He knew well enough that they must almost certainly be pursued, and that there would be little hesitation about shooting him or cutting his throat if they were caught and if he resisted, as he knew that he should. He had been in love with her for days. The last twenty-four hours had made him desperate. And a desperate man is not to be played with, more especially if he chance to have any Highland blood in his veins.

"What do you believe in most?" he asked suddenly and almost brutally.

She turned, startled, and looked him in the face.

"Because, if you believe in God, as I suppose you do, I take God to witness that I shall be a dead man this night, unless you promise to go with me."

She stared, and turned white to the lips, as he had never seen her turn pale before. She leaned forward, gazing into his eyes and breathing hard.

"You do not mean that," she said, as though trying hard to convince herself.

"I mean it," he answered slowly, pale himself, and knowing what he said.

She leaned nearer to him and took his arms with her hands, for she could not speak. The terrible question was in his eyes.

"You would kill yourself, if I refused—if I would not go with you?" Still she could not believe him.

"Yes," he answered.

Once more the room was very still, as the two looked into one another's eyes. But Maria Addolorata said nothing. The frown deepened on Dalrymple's face, and his strong mouth was drawn, as a man draws in his lips at the moment of meeting death.

"Good-bye," he said, gently loosening himself from her hold.

Her hands dropped and she turned half round, following him as he went towards the door. His

hand was almost on the latch. He did not turn. But as he heard her swift feet behind him, he bent his head a little. Her arms went round his throat, reaching up to his great height.

"No! No!" she cried, drawing his head down to her.

But he took her by the wrists and held her away from him at his arms' length.

"Are you in earnest?" he asked fiercely. "If you play with me any more, you shall die, too."

"But not to-day!" she answered imploringly. "Not to-night! Give me time — a day — a little while —"

"To lose you? No. I have been near losing you. I know what it means. Make up your mind. Yes, or no."

"To-night? But how? There is not time — these clothes I wear —"

She turned her head distractedly to one side and the other as she spoke, while he held her wrists. Dalrymple saw that there was reason in the objections she made. So dangerous a flight could not be undertaken without some preparation. He loosed her hands and began to pace the room, concentrating his mind upon the details. She watched him in silence, leaning against the back of the easy chair. Then he stopped just before her.

"My cloak would come down to your feet," he said, measuring her height with his eyes. "I have

a plaid which would cover your head. Once on horseback, no one would notice anything. Can you ride?"

"No. I never learned."

"That is unlucky. But we can manage it. The main thing would be to get a long start if possible — that you should not be missed — to get away just at the beginning of the longest time during which the nuns would not expect to see you. Where is your own room? Is it near this?"

Maria Addolorata told him, and explained the position of the balcony with the steps leading down into the garden. He asked her who kept the key of the postern. It was in the possession of the gardener, who took it away with him at night, but the lock was on the inside, and uncovered, as old Italian locks are. By raising the curved spring one could push back the bolt. There was a handle on the latter, for that purpose. There would be no difficulty about getting out, nor about letting Dalrymple in, provided that the night were dark.

"The moon is almost full," said Dalrymple, thoughtfully, and he began to walk up and down again. "Never mind. It must be to-morrow night. In your dark dress, when the sisters are asleep, if you keep in the shadow along the wall, there is not the slightest risk. I will be waiting for you on the

other side of the gate with my cloak and plaid. I will have the horses ready, a little higher up. There is a good mule path which goes down into the valley on that side. You have only to reach the gate and let yourself out. It is very easy. Tell me at what time to be waiting."

Maria leaned heavily upon the chair, with bent head.

"I cannot do it — oh, I cannot!" she said despairingly. "The shame of it! To be the talk of Rome — the scandal of the day — a disgrace to my father and mother!"

Dalrymple frowned, and biting his lip, he struck his clenched fist softly with the palm of his hand, making a few quick steps backward and forward. He stopped suddenly and looked at her with dangerous eyes.

"I have told you," he said. "I will not repeat it. You must choose."

"Oh, you cannot be in earnest —"

"You shall see. It is plain enough," he added, with an accent of scorn. "You are more afraid of a little talk and gossip in Rome, than of being told to-morrow morning that I died in the night. That is Italian courage, I suppose."

She hung her head for a moment. Then, as she heard his footsteps, she threw her veil back and saw that he was going towards the door without a word.

"You are cruel," she said, half catching her breath. "You know that you make me suffer — that I cannot live without you."

"I shall certainly not live without you," he answered. "I mean to have you at any price, or I will die in the attempt to get you."

The words have a melodramatic look on paper. But he spoke them not only with his lips, but with his whole self. They were not out of keeping with his nature. There is no more desperate blood in the world's veins than that of the Celt when he is driven to bay or exasperated by passion. In him the reckless fatalism of the Asiatic is blended with the cool daring of the northerner.

Maria Addolorata had little experience of the world or of men, but she had the hereditary instincts of her sex, and as she looked at Dalrymple she recognized in him the man who would do what he said, or forfeit his life in trying to do it. There is no mistaking the truth about such men, at such moments.

"I believe you would," she said, and she felt pride in saying it.

Her own life was in the balance. She bent her head again. Her temples were throbbing, and it was hard to think at all connectedly.

"I want your answer," he said, still standing near the door." "Yes or no — for to-morrow night?"

"I cannot live without you," she answered slowly, and still looking down. "I must go."

But she did not meet his eyes, for she knew that she was wavering still, and almost as uncertain as before. All at once Dalrymple's manner changed. He came quietly to her side and took one of her hands, which hung idly over the back of the chair, in both of his.

"You must be in earnest, as I am, my dear," he said, very calmly and gently. "You must not play with a man's life and heart, as though they were worth nothing but play. You called me cruel, dear, a moment ago. But you are more cruel than I, for I do not hesitate."

"I must go," she repeated, still avoiding his look. "Yes, I must go. I should die without you."

"But to-morrow when I come, you will hesitate again," he said, still speaking very quietly. "I must be sure. You must give me some promise, something more than you have given me yet."

She looked up with startled eyes.

"You do not believe me?" she asked. "What shall I do? I — I promise! You yourself have never said that you promised."

"Does it need that?" He pressed the hand he held, with softly increasing strength, between his palms.

"No," she answered, looking at him. "I can

see it. You will do what you say. I have promised, too."

He gazed incredulously into her face.

"Do you doubt me?" she asked.

"Have I not reason to doubt? You change your mind easily. I do not blame you. But how am I to believe?"

She grew impatient of his unbelief. Yet as he pressed her hand, the power he had over her increased with every second.

"But I will, I will!" she cried, in a low voice. "And still you doubt — I see it in your eyes. Have I not promised? What more can I do?"

"I do not know," he answered. "But you must make me believe you." The strength of his eyes seemed to be forcing something from her.

"I say it — I promise it — I swear it! Do I not love you? Am I not giving my soul for you? Have I not given it already? What more can I do or say?"

"I do not know," he answered a second time, holding her with his eyes. "I must believe you before I go."

He spoke honestly and earnestly, not meaning to exasperate her, searching in her look for what was unmistakably in his own. His hands shook, not weakly, as they held hers. His piercing eyes seemed to see through and through her. She trembled all over, and the colour rose to her face,

more in despair of convincing him than in a blush of shame.

"Believe me!" she said, imperiously, and her eyelids contracted with the effort of her will.

But he said nothing. She felt that he was immeasurably stronger than she. But just then, he was not more desperate. There was a short, intense silence. Her face grew pale and was set with the fatal look she sometimes had.

"I pledge you with my blood!" she said suddenly.

Her eyes did not waver from his, but she wrenched her right hand from him, and before he could take it again, her even teeth had met in the flesh. The bright scarlet drops rose high and broke, and trickled in vivid stripes across her hand as she held it before his face. Her own was very white, but without a trace of pain. Something in the fierce action appealed strongly to the fiery Celtic nature of the man. His features relaxed instantly.

"I believe you," he said, and she knew it as his arms went round her; and the pain of the wound made his kisses sweeter.

CHAPTER XI

When Dalrymple left Maria on that day, he returned as usual to Stefanone's house. Sora Nanna was alone, for Stefanone was still absent in Rome, and Annetta had gone on the previous day with a number of women to the fair at Civitella San Sisto, which took place on Sunday. She was expected to return on Monday afternoon. It is usual enough for a party of women, with two or three men, to go to the fairs in neighbouring towns and to spend the night with the friends of some one of the company. It was more common still, in those days.

Sora Nanna gave Dalrymple his dinner and kept him company for a while. But he was gloomy and preoccupied, and before long she retired to the regions of the laundry, which was installed in a long low building that ran out into the vegetable garden at the back of the house. Monday was generally the day for ironing the heavy linen of the convent, which was taken up on Tuesdays in the huge baskets carried by four women, slung to a pole which rested on their shoulders in the old primitive fashion, just as litters are still carried in

many parts of Asia. It had occurred more than once to Dalrymple, during the last two days, that he could hide almost anything he chose in one of these baskets, which were always delivered directly to Maria Addolorata and which she was at liberty to unpack in the privacy of the linen room if she chose.

He thought of this again as he sat over his dinner, and heard the endless song of the women, far off, at their work. He knew the habits of the house thoroughly and all the customs regarding the carrying up of the baskets, and he remembered that several of them would surely be taken to the convent on the morrow. He thought that if he could procure some more suitable clothes for Maria to wear, this would be a safe means of conveying them to her. She could put them on in her cell, just before the hour at which she was to expect him, so that there would be no time lost and the danger of detection during their flight would be greatly diminished. But there were all sorts of difficulties in the way, and he realized them one by one, until he almost abandoned the scheme in favour of the cloak and plaid which he had first proposed.

He pushed back his chair and went upstairs to his own room. The impression made upon him by Maria Addolorata, when she had bitten her hand, had been a strong one, but the man's nature,

though not exactly distrustful, was melancholic and pessimistic. Two hours and more had passed since they had been together, and things had a different look. He realized more clearly the strength of the ties which bound Maria to her convent life, and the effort it must be to her to break them. He remembered the arguments he had used, and he saw that they had been those of passion rather than of reason. Their effect could not be lasting, when he himself was not there to lend them his words and the persuasion of his strength. Maria would repent of her promise, and there was nothing to bind her to it. Hitherto there had been no risk, no common danger. By a chain of natural circumstances he had made his way into a most extraordinary position, but it was in her power, in a moment of repentance, to force him from it. While the abbess was ill, Maria was virtually mistress of the convent. At a word from her the doors might be shut in his face. She might promise again, and bite her hand again, but when it came to his waiting outside the garden gate, she might be seized by a fit of repentance, and he might wait till morning.

As he sat in his room he realized all this, and more, for he knew that on calm reflexion he meant to do what he had that morning threatened in his haste. He had never been attached to life for its own sake. Melancholic men often are not. He

had many times thought over the subject of suicide with a sort of grim interest in it, which indicated the direction his temper would take if he were ever absolutely defeated in a matter which he had at heart.

Nothing he had ever felt in his life had taken hold of him as his love for Maria Addolorata, for he had never really been in love before and he had completely abandoned himself to it, as such a man was sure to do in such surroundings. She was beautiful, but that was not all. Since he had heard her sing, he knew that her voice and her rare talent together were genius and nothing less. But that was far from being all. She was of his own class, and he had been seeing her daily, when the peasant women amongst whom he lived were little more than good-natured animals; but even that was not all. He was at that time of life when a man's character is apt to take a violent and sudden turn in its ultimate direction, when the forces that have been growing show themselves all at once, when passion, having appealed as yet but to the man, has climbed and is within reach of his soul, to take hold of it and twist it, or to be finally conquered, perhaps, in a holy life. But Dalrymple was very far from being the kind of man who could have taken refuge against himself in higher things. At a time when materialism was beginning to seem a great thing, he was a strong materialist in scientific

questions. He grasped what he could see and held it, but what he could not see had no existence for him. Nothing transcendental attracted him beyond the sphere of mathematics. Yet he had not the materialist's temperament, for the Highland blood in his veins brought strong fancies and sudden passions to his head and heart, such as his chemistry could not explain; and when the brain burned and the heart beat fast, it meant doing or dying with him, as with many a Scotchman before and since. Life had never seemed to be worth much in his eyes, compared with a thing he wanted.

He sat still and thought the matter over, and considered the question of death, for a few short minutes. There was not a trace of philosophical speculation in his reflexions, or they would have lasted longer. He merely desired to be sure, with that curious Scotch caution, of his own intentions, in order not to be obliged to think the matter over again at the last minute.

He had drunk a measure of strong wine with his dinner, as usual. To-day it increased the gloom of his temper, and the pessimistic view he took. In less than a quarter of an hour he had made up his mind that if Maria Addolorata repented at a late hour and refused to leave the convent, he would make an attempt to carry her away by force. If he failed, and found himself shut off from all possibility of intercourse with her, life would not be

worth living, and he would throw it away. When strong men are in that frame of mind, they generally accomplish what they have in view. Moreover, it is a great mistake to think that the people who think and talk of suicide will not take their own lives. On the contrary, statistics show that it is more often those who speak of it the most frequently, who ultimately make away with themselves. The mere fact of contemplating and discussing death familiarizes man with it till he does not even attribute to it its true value, which is little enough, as most of us know. Dalrymple was in earnest, and he knew it.

He rose from his chair and unlocked his little laboratory. Among many other things upon the long table there was a plain English oak box, filled with small stoppered bottles, each having a label upon it with the name of the contents written in his own hand. Some were merely medicines, which he carried with him in case his services should ever be required, as had happened at the present time. Others were chemicals which he used in his experiments, such as he could not easily have procured in Italy, outside of the great cities. One even contained the common spirits of camphor, of which he had once given Annetta a teaspoonful when she had complained of a chill and sickness. One, however, was more than half full of a solution of hydrocyanide of potassium, a liquid little less suddenly

and surely fatal than the prussic acid which enters into its composition.

He took out this bottle and held it up to the light. The liquid was clear and transparent as water. He watched it curiously as he made it run up to the neck and back again. It might have been taken for pure alcohol, being absolutely colourless.

"It would not take much of that," he said to himself, with a grim smile.

His meditations were interrupted by the voice of Sora Nanna, who had opened his bedroom door without ceremony and stood calling to him. He came forward hastily from the laboratory and went up to her.

"You do not know!" she cried, laughing and holding up a letter. "Stefanone has written to me from Rome! To me! Who the devil knows what he says? I do not understand anything of it. Who should teach me to read? He takes me for a priest, that I should know how to read!"

Dalrymple laughed a little as he took the letter. He picked up his hat from a chair, for he meant to go out and spend the afternoon alone upon the hillside.

"We will read it downstairs," he said. "I am going for a walk."

He read it to her in the common room on the ground floor. It was a letter dictated by Stefanone to a public scribe, instructing his wife to tell

Gigetto that she must send another load of wine to Rome as soon as possible, as the price was good in the market. Stefanone would remain in the city till it came, and sell it before returning.

"These husbands!" exclaimed Sora Nanna, with a grin. "What they will not do! They go, riding, riding, and they come back when it seems good to them. Who tells me what he does in Rome? Rome is great."

Dalrymple laughed, put on his hat and went off, leaving Sora Nanna to find Gigetto and give the necessary directions.

CHAPTER XII.

Gigetto had refused to accompany Annetta and her party to the fair at Civitella San Sisto. He had been to Rome several times, and was far too fine a young gentleman to divert himself in such a very primitive place. He preferred to spend his leisure hours, which were very many, in elegant idleness, according to his lights, between the tobacconist's, the chemist's shop, which was the resort of all the superior men of the place after four o'clock in the afternoon, and the abundant, though not very refined table which was spread twice daily in his father's house. Civitella wine, Civitella fireworks, and especially Civitella girls, were quite beneath his notice. As for Annetta, he looked upon her with something like contempt, though he had a high respect for the fortune which must one day be hers. She was to be a necessary encumbrance of his future life, and for the present he meant to see as little of her as was conveniently possible without relinquishing his claims to her hand. She had admired him, in a way, until the arrival of Dalrymple, and he felt a little irritation at the Scotchman's presence in the house, so that he occasionally

frightened Sora Nanna by talking of waiting for him with a gun at the corner of the forest. It produced a good impression, he thought, to show from time to time that he was not without jealousy. But as for going with her on such an expedition as a visit to a country fair, it was not to be expected of him.

Nevertheless, Annetta had enjoyed herself thoroughly with her companions, and was very glad that Gigetto had not been at her elbow with his city notions of propriety, which he applied to her, but made as elastic as he pleased for himself. She had been to high mass in the village church, crowded to suffocation, she had walked up and down the main street half the afternoon, arm in arm with the other girls, giggling and showing off her handsome costume to the poorer natives of the little place, and smiling wickedly at the handsome youths who stood idly in groups at the corners of the streets. She had dined sumptuously, and had made her eyes sparkle like rather vulgar little stars by drinking a glass of strong old white wine to the health and speedy marriage of all the other girls. She had gone out with them at dusk, and had watched the pretty fireworks in the small piazza, and had wandered on with them afterwards in the moonlight to the ruin of the Cyclopean fortress which overlooks the two valleys. Then back to the house of her friends, who kept the

principal inn, and more tough chicken and tender salad and red wine for supper. And on the next day they had all gone down to the meagre vineyards, half way to San Vito and just below the thick chestnut woods which belong to the Marchese and feudal lord of that ancient town. And there amongst the showers of reddening vine leaves, she had helped to gather the last grapes of the year, with song and jest and laughter. At noon they climbed the hill again in the October sun, and dined upon the remains of the previous day's feast; then, singing still, they had started on their homeward downward way, happy and not half tired yet when they reached Subiaco in the evening glow.

They came trooping through the town to the little piazza in which the doctor's house was situated. They separated here, some to go up to the higher part, while others were to go down in the same direction as Annetta. The girl looked up at the doctor's windows, and her small eyes flashed viciously. It would be a pleasant ending to the two days' holiday to have a look at her work. Now that he was getting well, as Dalrymple told her, she was glad that she had not killed him. It was an even greater satisfaction to have almost frightened the old coward to death. She had been uneasy about the question of confession.

"By Bacchus," she laughed, "I will go and see Sor Tommaso. They say he is better."

So she took leave of her companions and entered the narrow door, and climbed the short flight of dark steps and knocked. The doctor's sleeping-room opened directly upon the staircase. He used the room on the ground floor as an office and dining-room, his old peasant woman-servant slept in the attic, and the other two rooms were let by the year. It was a very small house.

The old woman, whose name was Serafina, opened the bedroom door and thrust out her head, covered with a dark and threadbare shawl. There was a sibylline gloom about her withered face, as though she had lived a lifetime in the face of a horror to come.

"What do you want?" she croaked roughly, and not opening the door any wider.

"Eh! What do I want? I am the Annetta of Stefanone, and I have come to pay a visit to this dear doctor, because they say that he is better, God bless him."

"Oh! I did not recognize you," said the old woman. "I will ask."

Still holding the door almost closed, she drew in her head and spoke with Sor Tommaso. Annetta could hear his answer.

"Of course!" he said, in a voice still weak, but singularly oily with the politeness of his intention. "Let her favour us!"

The door was opened, and Annetta went in. Sor

Tommaso was sitting up near the window, in a deep easy-chair covered with ragged green damask. The girl was surprised by his pallor, as compared with his formerly rubicund complexion. Peasant-like, she glanced about the room to judge of its contents before she spoke.

"How are you, dear Sor Tommaso?" she asked after the short pause. "Eh, what we have suffered for you, all of us! Who was this barbarian who wished to send you to Paradise?"

"Who knows?" returned Sor Tommaso, with amazing blandness. "I trust that he may be forgiven as I forgive him."

"What it is to be a wise man!" exclaimed Annetta, with affected admiration. "To have such sentiments! It is a beautiful thing. And how do you feel now, dear Sor Tommaso? Are you getting your strength again? They took your blood, those cowardly murderers! You must make it again."

Their eyes met, and each knew that the other knew and understood. Sor Tommaso smiled gently. The savage girl's mouth twitched as though she should have liked to laugh.

"Little by little; who goes slowly goes safely," answered the doctor. "I am an old man, you must know."

"Old!" Annetta was glad of the opportunity to laugh at last. "Old? Eh, on Sunday, when

you have on those new black trousers of yours that are tight, tight — you seem to me a boy as young as Gigetto. For my part, I should prefer you. You are more serious. Gigetto! What must I say? He is handsome, he may be good, but he has not a head. There is nothing in that pumpkin."

"Blood of youth," answered Sor Tommaso. "It must boil. It must fling its chains about. Afterwards it begins to know the chains. Little by little it accustoms itself to them. Then it is quiet, quiet, as we old ones are. Sit down, my daughter. Serafina! A chair — the one that is not lame. These chairs remember the blessed soul of mamma," added Sor Tommaso, in explanation of their weakness.

"Requiesca'!" exclaimed Annetta, sitting down.

"Amen," responded Sor Tommaso. "You are so beautiful to-day," he continued, looking at her flowered bodice and new apron; "where have you been?"

"Where should I go? To Civitella. There was the fair. We ate certain chickens — tough! But the air of the mountain consumes. There were also fireworks."

"What? Have you walked?" asked Sor Tommaso.

"Even with two legs one can walk," laughed the girl. "But of course a beast is better with four. The beasts had all gone to Tivoli with wine for Rome. They had not come back yesterday morn-

ing. Therefore with these two feet I walked. I and many others, girls like me. It is true that I am half dead."

"You are fresher than lettuce," observed Sor Tommaso. "And then you have climbed up my stairs. This is a true Christian act. God return it to you. I am alone all day."

"But the Englishman comes to see you," said Annetta, indifferently.

"The Englishman, yes. He comes. More or less, he has almost cured me. But then, for his conversation, I say nothing!"

"Meanwhile he is also curing the abbess. He has a fortunate hand. There death, here death—he makes them all alive. Where is death, now? Here, perhaps? Hidden in some corner, or under the bed? He has certain medicines, that Englishman! Medicines that you do not even dream of. Strong! It is I that tell you. Sometimes, the whole house smells of them. Death could not resist them a moment. They drive even the flies out of the windows. The Englishman gave me some once. I had been in the sun and had drunk a gallon of cold water, foolish as I was. I was thirsty, as I am now. Well, he gave me a spoonful of something like water, mixed in water. I do not tell you anything. At first it burned me. Archpriest, it burned! Then, not even a minute, and I had Paradise in my body. And so it passed."

"Who knows? A cordial, perhaps," observed Sor Tommaso, thoughtfully. "I have such cordials, too."

"I do not doubt it," answered the girl, suspiciously. "But I would rather not taste them. I feel quite well."

It crossed her mind that in return for three knife-thrusts, Sor Tommaso would probably not miss so good a chance of paying her with a glass of poison. She would certainly have done as much herself, had she been in his place.

"Who thought of offering you cordials!" replied the doctor, with a polite laugh. "I said it to say it. But if you are thirsty, command me. There is water and good wine. They are the best cordials."

"Eh, a little water. I do not refuse. As for the wine, no. I thank you the same. I am fasting and have walked. After supper, at home, I will drink."

"Serafina!" cried Sor Tommaso, and the old sibyl immediately appeared from the stairs, whither she had discreetly retired to wait during Annetta's visit. "Bring water, and that bottle of my wine from downstairs. You know, the bottle of old wine of Stefanone's that was opened."

"No, no. I want no wine," said Annetta, quickly.

"Bring it all the same. Perhaps she will do us the honour to drink it."

Serafina nodded, and her bare feet were heard on the stone steps as she descended.

"It is bad to drink pure water when one is very thirsty," said Sor Tommaso. "It cramps the stomach. A little wine gives the stomach strength. But it is best to eat. If you will eat, there are fresh jumbles. I also eat them."

"I thank you the same," answered Annetta. "I wish only water. It is a long way from Civitella, and there is no good spring. There is the brook that runs out of the pond at the foot of the last hill. But it is heavy water, full of stuff."

Serafina came back, bringing two heavy tumblers of pressed glass on a little black japanned tray, with a decanter of cold water. In her other hand she carried two bottles, one half full of wine, the other containing the white and sugary syrup of peach kernels of which Italians are so fond.

"I brought this also," she said, holding up the bottle as she set down the tray. "Perhaps it is better."

"Yes," said Sor Tommaso, nodding in approbation. "It is better."

"You will drink a little orgeat?" asked the old woman, in a tone of persuasion, and mixing it in the glass.

"Water, simply water," said Annetta, who was still suspicious. "Give me water in the other glass."

"But I have mixed already in both," answered Serafina. "Eh, you will drink it. You will not make an old woman like me go all the way down the stairs again. But then, it is good. It is I that tell you. I made it myself, yesterday morning, for the doctor, to refresh his blood a little."

Annetta had risen to her feet and was watching the glasses, as the old woman stirred the white syrup in the water with an old-fashioned, long-handled spoon. She did not wish to seem absurdly suspicious, and yet she distrusted her enemy. She took one of the glasses, went to his side, and held it to his lips as one gives an invalid drink.

"After you," he said, with a polite smile, but raising his hand to take the glass.

"Sick people first, well people afterwards," answered Annetta, smiling too, but watching him intently.

He had satisfied himself that she really suspected foul play, for he knew the peasants well, and was only a degree removed from them himself. He at once dismissed her suspicions by drinking half the tumbler at a draught. She immediately took the other and emptied it eagerly, as she was really very thirsty.

"A little more?" suggested Serafina, in her croaking voice.

"No," interposed Sor Tommaso. "It might hurt her — so much at once."

But Annetta filled the tumbler with pure water, and emptied it again.

"At last!" she exclaimed with a sigh of satisfaction. "What thirst! I seemed to have eaten ashes! And now I thank you, Sor Tommaso, and I am going home; for it is Ave Maria, and I do not wish to make a bad meeting in the dark as happened to you. Ugly assassins! I will never forgive them, never! What am I to say at home? That you will come to supper one of these days?"

"Eh, if God wills," answered the doctor. "I will be accompanied by Serafina."

"I!" exclaimed the old woman. "I am afraid even of a cat! What could I do for you?"

"Company is always company," said Sor Tommaso, wisely. "Where one would not go, two go bravely. Good evening, my beautiful daughter," he added, looking up at Annetta. "The Madonna go with you."

"Thank you, and good evening," answered the girl, dropping half a courtsey, with a vicious twinkle in her little eyes.

She turned, and was out of the room in a moment. On the way home through the narrow streets in the evening glow, she sang snatches of song to herself, and thought of all she had said to Sor Tommaso, and of all he had said to her, and of how much afraid he was of her father's knife. For

otherwise, as she knew, he would have had her arrested.

Suddenly, at the last turning she stopped and turned very pale, clasping both hands upon her bodice.

"Assassin!" she groaned, grinding her short white teeth. "He has poisoned me, after all! An evil death to him and all his house! Assassin!"

She forgot that she had experienced precisely the same sensations once before, when she had been overheated and had swallowed too much cold water.

CHAPTER XIII.

With slow steps, and pressing her clasped hands to her bodice, the girl reached the door of her father's house at dusk. She knew that he was away, and that as she had not come home earlier her mother would be in the lower regions preparing Dalrymple's supper for him. The door which gave access to the staircase from the street was still open, and she was almost sure of being able to reach her own room unobserved, unless she chanced to come upon Dalrymple himself on the stairs. Just then she would rather have met him than her mother. She was in great pain, and it would have been hard to explain to Sora Nanna that she believed herself to have been deliberately poisoned.

She crept noiselessly up the stairs, which were almost dark, and she came to Dalrymple's door which faced the first landing. She paused and hesitated, leaning against the wall. He was a wise man in her opinion, and would of course understand her symptoms at once. But then, as she was poisoned, he could do nothing for her. If that were true, her next thought told her that Sor Tommaso must have poisoned himself. He would not

do that. She had never heard of antidotes; for though poisoning was traditionally familiar to her and the people of her class, it was very uncommon. Yet her sharpened wit told her that if Sor Tommaso had swallowed the stuff, as he had done, with a smile, he had means at his disposal for counteracting it — some medicine which he had doubtless taken as soon as she had left him. But if he had medicine to save from poison, Dalrymple, who was a far wiser man, must have such medicines, too, and even better ones. This reflexion decided her. She was close to his door. It was probable that he would be in his room at that hour. She was in fear of her life, and she knocked.

But Dalrymple had not come back. He had gone for a long walk alone in the hills, had climbed higher as the sun sank lower, and was belated in steep paths along which even his mountain-trained feet trod with some caution. He was too familiar with the country to lose his way, but he by no means found the shortest way there was, nor was he especially anxious to do so. The hours would pass sooner in walking than in sitting over his books under the flaring little flames of the three brass beaks.

Annetta saw that there was no light in the room, for the hole through which the latch-string hung was worn wide with use. She felt dizzy, too, and the knife-like pain ran through her so that she

bent herself. She knew that Dalrymple kept his medicines locked up in the laboratory, and that she could not get at them, though she would have had little hesitation in swallowing anything she found, in the simple certainty that all his medicines must be good in themselves, and therefore life-saving and good for her. But he was out, and she was sure that there could be nothing in the bedroom. She had herself too often looked into every corner when she watered and swept the brick floor each morning, and put things in order according to her primitive ideas.

She then and there lost her hold upon life. She was poisoned, and must die. She was as sure of it as the Chinaman who has seen an eagle, and who, recognizing that his hour is come, calmly lies down and breathes his last by the mere suspension of volition. In old countries the lower orders, as a rule, have but a low vitality. It may be truer to say that the vital volition is weak. Let the learned settle the definition. The fact is easily accounted for. During generations upon generations the majority of European agricultural populations live upon vegetable food, like the majority of Eastern Asiatics, and with the same result. Hard labour produces hard muscles, but vegetable food yields a low vital tension, so to say. Soldiers know it well enough. The pale-faced city clerk who eats meat twice a day will out-fight and out-

last and out-starve the burly labourer whose big thews and sinews are mostly compounded of potatoes, corn, and water.

The girl crept up the stairs stealthily to her lonely little room, and lay down to die upon her bed, as though that were the only thing to be done under the circumstances. It never occurred to her to go to her mother and tell her what had happened and what she suspected, any more than it had suggested itself to Sor Tommaso to lay information against her for having stabbed him. If her father had been at home, she might perhaps have gone to him and told him with her dying breath that the doctor had killed her, and that Stefanone must avenge her. But he was away. She was stronger than her mother and had always dominated her. She knew also that if she complained, Sora Nanna would raise such a scream as would bring half Subiaco running to the house. The girl's animal instinct was to die alone, and quietly. So she made no sound, and lay upon her bed writhing in pain and holding her sides with all her might, but with close-set teeth and silent lips.

Looked at from the point of view of fact, it was all ridiculous enough. The girl had been all day in the hot autumn sun, had eaten a quantity of over-ripe figs and grapes, which might have upset the digestion of an ostrich, had tired even her strong limbs with the final walk home, and had

then, at Sor Tommaso's house, swallowed nearly a quart of ice-cold water. It was not surprising that she should be very ill. It was not even strange that the theory of poison should suggest itself. To her it was tragedy, and meant nothing less than death, when she lay down upon her bed.

Between the spasms all sorts of things passed through her mind, when her head lay still upon the pillow. Chiefly and particularly her thoughts were filled with hatred of Sor Tommaso, and a sort of doglike longing to see Dalrymple's face before she died. She was still fascinated by the vision of his red hair and bright blue eyes which came back to her vividly, with the careless smile his hard face had for her half-childish, half-malicious sayings. And with the thought of him came also jealousy of Maria Addolorata, and another hatred which was deeper and stronger and more vengeful than any she owed Sor Tommaso. She felt, rather than understood, that Dalrymple loved the nun with all his heart. She had spoken of her to him and had watched his face, and had seen the quick, savage glare of his eyes, though his voice had only expressed his annoyance. As the vision of him rose before her, she saw him as he had been when the angry blush had overspread his face to the roots of his hair.

The image fixed itself. In the dim shadow behind it, she saw the face of Maria Addolorata

like a death-mask, and those strange, deep eyes of the nun's looking scornfully at her over the man's shoulder, though she forgot him in the woman's deadly fascination. She stared, unable to close her lids, as it seemed to her, though she longed to shut out the sight. Then a dull noise seemed to be in her ears, a noise that was not a sound, but the stunning effect on her brain of a sound not heard but imagined. There were great circles of light around the nun's head, which cut through Dalrymple's face and then hid it. They were like glories, like the halos about the heads of saints. Annetta was angry with them, for she was sure that Maria Addolorata was bad, and sinned in her throat.

"An evil death on you and all your house!" cried the angry peasant girl, in a low voice.

"Death!" She could not tell whence the echo came back to her, in a tone strange to her ears — for it was her own, perhaps.

She was startled. The vision vanished, and she sat up on her bed with a quick movement, suddenly wide awake. The pain must have passed. No — it came again, but with far less keenness. She felt her face with her hands, and laughed softly, for she knew that she was alive. It was night, and she must have lain some time there all alone, for there was a silvery, misty something through the darkness, the white dawn of moonrise,

which is not like the dawn of day, nor like the departing twilight. As she sat up she saw the outline of the hills, jagged against the crosses of the lead-joined panes in the window. There was the moon-dawn sending up its soft radiance to the sky. A little longer she watched, and a single bright point sent one level ray straight into her face. A moment more and the room was flooded with light so that she could see the smallest objects distinctly.

"But I am alive!" she exclaimed in a soft, glad tone. "The brigand only did me a spite. He was afraid to kill me."

The pain seized her again, less sharp than before, but keen enough to stir her anger. She still sat up, but bent forward, clasping her bodice. In the moonlight she could see her heavy shoes on her feet sticking up before her. Realizing that it was a disgraceful thing to lie down with them on, she sprang off the bed, and began to dust the coverlet with her hand. The pain passed.

After all, she reflected, she had swallowed a quantity of cold water at Sor Tommaso's, whether the first glass had contained any poison or not. She had not forgotten, either, that the same thing had once happened to her before, and that Dalrymple had made it pass with a spoonful of something that had stung her mouth and throat, but which had afterwards warmed her and cured her. She

felt chilly now, and she wished that she had some of that same stinging, warming stuff.

Something moved, somewhere in the house. The girl listened intently for a moment. Probably Dalrymple had come back and was moving about in his room, washing his hands, as he always did before supper, and taking off his heavy boots. His room was immediately under hers, facing in the same direction. She went towards the door, intending to go down at once and ask him for some of his medicine. By this time she was persuaded that she was not in any danger, and her common-sense told her that she had merely made herself momentarily ill with too many grapes, too much cold water, and too long exposure to the sun. She did not care to let her mother know anything about it, for Sora Nanna would scold her. It would be a simple matter to catch the Scotchman at his door, to get what she wanted from him with an easily given promise of secrecy, and then to come down-stairs as though nothing had happened.

Annetta only hesitated a moment, and then went out into the dark staircase, and crept down, as she had crept up, feeling her way at the turnings, by the wall. She reached the door, and was surprised to see that there was no light within — none of that yellow light which a lamp makes, but only the grey glimmer of the moonlight through the shadow, creeping out by the hole of the latch-string.

Her ears had deceived her, and Dalrymple was not there. Nevertheless she believed that he was. The moonlight would be in his room as it was in hers, just overhead, and he might not have taken the trouble to light his lamp. It was very probable. She tapped softly, but there was no answer. She was afraid that her mother might come up the stairs and hear her speaking through the door, as though by stealth. She put her lips close to the hole of the latch and whistled softly. Her whistle was broken by her own smile as she fancied that Dalrymple might start at the unexpected sound.

But there was no response. Growing bolder, she called him gently.

"Signor! Are you there?"

There was no answer. Just then, as she stooped, the pain ran through her once more. She was so sure that she had heard him that she was convinced he must be within, very probably in his little laboratory beyond the bedroom. The pain hurt her, and he had the medicine. Very naturally she pulled the string and pushed the door open.

He was not there. The moonlight flooded everything, and the whitewashed walls reflected it, so that the place was as bright as day. The first object that met her eyes was a small bottle standing near the edge of the table in the middle of the room, where Dalrymple had carelessly set it down in the afternoon when Sora Nanna had called him

to read her letter. It was directly in the line of the moon's rays, and the stopper gleamed like a little star.

Annetta started with joy as she saw it. It was the very bottle from which he had given her the camphor, less than a month ago — the same in size, in its transparent contents, in its label. It might have deceived a keener eye than hers.

The door of the laboratory stood open, as he had left it, being at the time preoccupied and careless. She only stopped a moment to assure herself that the bottle was the right one, reflecting that he had perhaps felt ill and had taken some of it himself. She went on and looked into the little room.

"Signore!" she called softly. But there was no answer.

It was clear that Dalrymple was either still out, or was downstairs at his supper, with her mother. He might be out, however. It was quite possible, on such a fine evening, for he was irregular in his hours. He would not like it if he came in suddenly and found her meddling with his belongings. She crossed the room again and softly shut the door. At least, if he came, she would not be found with the bottle in her hand. She could give an excuse.

It was all so natural. It was the same bottle. She knew the right quantity, for she had the peasant's memory for such detail. There was a glass

and a decanter of water on a white plate on the table. She had no spoon, but that did not matter. She took out the stopper with her strong fingers, though it stuck a little. The pain ran through her again as she poured some of the contents into the tumbler, and it made her hand shake so that she poured out a little more than necessary. But it did not matter. She filled it up with water, held the glass up to the moonlight, and drank it at a draught, and set the empty tumbler upon the table again.

Instantly her features changed. She felt as though she were struck through head and heart and body with red-hot steel. Maria Addolorata's death-mask rose before her in the moonlight.

"An evil death on you and all your house!" she tried to say.

But the words were not out of her mouth before she shivered, caught herself by the table, sank down, and lay stone dead upon the brick floor.

There was no noise. Dying, she thought she screamed, but only the faintest moan had passed her lips.

The door was shut, and the quiet moonlight floated in and silvered her dark, dead face.

CHAPTER XIV.

At moonrise on that evening, Maria Addolorata was standing at the open door of her cell, watching the dark clouds in the west, as they caught the light one by one, edge by edge. The black shadow of the convent covered all the garden still, and one passing could hardly have seen her as she stood there. Her veil was raised, and the cold mountain breeze chilled her cheeks. But she did not feel it, for she had been long by the abbess's bedside, and then long, again, in the close choir of the church, and her head was hot and aching.

To her, as she looked towards the western mountains and watched the piling clouds, and felt the cool, damp wind, it seemed as though there were something strangely tragic in the air that night. The wind whistled now and then through the cracks of the convent windows and over the crenellations of the old walls, as Death's scythe might whistle if he were mowing down men with a right good will, heaps upon heaps of slain. The old bell struck the hour, sullenly, with a dead thud in the air after each stroke, as a bell tolls for a burial. The very clouds were black and silver in the sky, like a funeral pall.

Maria Addolorata leaned against the door-post and looked out, her hand white in the shadow against the dark wood, her face whiter still. But on her hand there were two marks, visible even in the dimness. They would have been red in the day, and the place hurt her from time to time, for she had bitten it savagely. It was her pledge, and the pain of it reminded her of what she had promised to do.

She needed the reminder; for now that he was not near her, the enormous crime stood out, black and lofty as death itself. It was different when Dalrymple was at her side. His violent vitality dragged hers into action, dragged, drove it, and goaded it, as unwilling soldiers have been driven into battle in barbarous armies. Then the fatality seemed irresistible, then the dangers seemed small, and the burning red shame was pale and weak. Those bony young hands of his had strength in them for two, his gleaming eyes burnt out the resistance in hers, and lighted them with their own glow. The hearty recklessness of his unbelief drove through and through her composite faith, and riddled it with loopholes for her soul's escape. Then the reality of her passion made her nobler love mad to be free, and to break through the solid walls in which it had been born and had grown too strong. When his love was there, hers matched itself with his, to smite fortune in the

face, to dare and out-dare heaven and hell for love's sake, with him, the bursting blood made iron of her hand, tingling to buffet coward fate's pale mouth. Then she was strong above women; then she was brave as brave men; then, having promised, to keep was but the natural hold of will, to die was but to dare one little adversary more.

But she was alone now, and thinking, as she looked out into the tragic night, and watched the blackness of the monumental clouds. She did not return to her former self, as some women do when the goad leaves the heart in peace for a moment. She did not say to herself that she would order the convent gate to be shut on Angus Dalrymple forever, and herself go back to the close choir, to sit in her seat amongst the rest, and sing holy songs with the others, restfully unhappy as many of them were. She knew far too well how strongly her heart could beat, and how icy cold her hands could grow when love was near her. Yet she shuddered with horror at what she had promised to do. She would struggle to the last, but she must yield when she heard his voice, and felt his hand, at the very last moment, when they should be at the garden gate, he drawing her on, she looking back.

It was perjury and sacrilege, and earthly shame, and eternal damnation. Nothing less. And the

words had full and deadly meaning for her. It mattered little that he should think differently, being of another faith, or rather, of no faith at all. It was all true to her. It was not risk; it was certainty. What forgiveness had earth or heaven for a faithless nun? He talked of marriage, and he would marry her according to a rite that had a meaning in his eyes. Heaven would not divorce the sworn and plighted spouse of Christ to be the earthly wife of Angus Dalrymple.

Visions of eternal torment rose in her mind, a tangible searing hell alive with flame and devils, a sea of liquid fire, an ocean of boiling pitch, Satan commanding in the midst, and a myriad of fiends working his tormenting will.

Her pale lips curled scornfully in the dark. Those were not the terrors that frightened her, nor the horrors from which she shrank. There was a question which was not to be answered by her own soul in damnation or salvation, but by the lips of men hereafter—the question of the honour of her name. The traditions of the good old barons were not dead in that day, nor are they all dead yet. Many a Braccio had done evil deeds in his or her day, and one, at least, had evil deeds to do after Maria Addolorata had been laid in her grave. But sin was one thing, and dishonour was quite another, even in the eyes of the nun of Subiaco. For her sins she could and must answer with the

weal or woe of her own soul. But her dishonour would be upon her father and her mother and upon all her race. Nor was there any dishonour deeper, more deadly, or more lasting than that brought upon a stainless name by a faithless nun. Maria Braccio hesitated at disgrace, while Maria Addolorata smiled at perdition. It was not the first time that honour had taken God's part against the devil in the history of her family.

That was the great obstacle of all, and she knew it now. She was able to face all consequences but that, terrible as they might be. The barrier was there, the traditional old belief in honour as first, and above every consideration. They had played upon that very belief, when, at the last, she had hesitated to take the veil. She had gone so far, they had told her, that it would be cowardly and dishonourable to turn back at the last minute. The same argument existed now. Then, she would at least have had human right and ecclesiastical law on her side, if she had refused to become a nun. Now, all was against her. Then, she would have had to face but the condemning opinion of a few who spoke of implied obligation. Now, she must stand up and be ashamed before the whole world. There would be a horrible publicity about it. She was too high born not to feel that all the world in which she should ever move was as one great family. Dalrymple might promise her

honour and respect, and the affection of his own father and mother for the love of her parents, a home, respected wifehood, and all the rest. With his strength, he might impose her upon his family, and they might treat her as he should dictate, for he was a strong and dominant man. But in their hearts, Protestants, English people, foreigners as they were to her race, even they could not tell themselves honestly that it was not a shameful thing to break such vows as hers, shameful and nothing less. And if, for a moment, he were not there to hold them in his check, she should see it in their faces, and she must hang her head, for she could have nothing to answer. For him, she must not only sacrifice her soul, wrench out her faith, break her promise to God, and her vows to the Church. She must give herself to public, earthly shame, for his sake.

It was too much. She could bear anything but that. Rather than endure that, it was better to die.

The black clouds rose higher in the west, and the gloomy air blew upon her face. Her head was no longer hot, for a chilly horror had come upon her, like the shadow of something unspeakably awful, close at hand. Suddenly, she was afraid to be alone. A bat, lured by the second twilight of the moon's rising, whirled down from above, with softly flapping wings, and almost brushed her face.

She drew back quickly into the doorway. It was a very tragic night, she thought. She shut the door, and groped her way out beyond her cell to the corridor, dimly illuminated by a single light hanging from the vault by a running cord. She entered the abbess's apartment. One of the sisters had taken her place, but Maria Addolorata sent her away by a gesture, and sat down by the bedside.

The old lady was either asleep, or did not notice her niece's coming. Her face was grey as ashes, and upturned in the shadow. Upon the stone floor stood the primitive Italian night-light, a wick supported in a triangular bit of tin by three little corks in oil floating on water in a tumbler. The light was very clear and steady, though there was little of it, and to Maria, who had been long in comparative darkness, the room seemed bright enough. There was little furniture besides the plain bed, a little table, a couple of chairs, and a tall, dark wardrobe. A grim crucifix hung above the abbess's head, on the white wall, the work of an age in which horror was familiar to the eye, and needed exaggeration to teach hardened humanity.

Maria was too much occupied with her own thoughts to notice the sick woman's condition at once. Besides, during the last two days there had been no return of the syncope, and the abbess had seemed to be improving steadily. She breathed rather heavily and seemed to be asleep.

Gradually, however, as the nun sat motionless beside her and as the storm of thought subsided, she became aware that all was not right. Her aunt's face was unnaturally grey, the breathing was unusually slow and heavy. When the breath was drawn in, the thin nostrils flattened themselves strangely on each side, and the features had a peaked look. Maria rose and felt the pulse. It was fluttering, and not always perceptible.

At first Maria's attention to these facts was only mechanical. Then, with a sudden sinking at her own heart, she realized what they might mean — another crisis like the one in which the abbess had so narrowly escaped death. It was true that on that occasion she had called for help more than once, showing that she had felt herself to be sinking. At present she seemed to be unconscious, which, if anything, was a worse feature.

Maria drew a long breath and held it, biting her lips, as people do in moments of suspense, doubt, and anxiety. It was as though fate had thrust the great decision onward at the last moment. The life that hung in the balance before her eyes meant the possibility of waiting, with the feeble consolation of being yet undecided.

She stood as still as a statue, her face like a mask, her hand on the unconscious woman's wrist. The stimulant which Dalrymple had shown her

how to use was at hand — the glass with which to administer it. It would prolong life. It might save it.

Should she give it? The seconds ran to minutes, and the dreadful question was unanswered. If the abbess died, as die she almost certainly must within half an hour, if the medicine were not given to her — if she died, Maria would call the sisters, the portress would be instructed, and when Dalrymple came on the morrow, he would be told that all was over, and that he was no longer needed. Nothing could be more sure. He might do his utmost. He could not enter the convent again.

In a quick vision, as she stood stone-still, Maria saw herself alone in the chapel by night, prostrate, repentant, washing the altar steps with tears, forgiven of God, since God could still forgive her, honoured on earth as before, since none but the silent confessor could ever know what she had done, still less what she had meant to do. Her sorrow would be real, overwhelming, able to move Heaven to mercy, her penance true-hearted and severe as she deserved. Her name would be unspotted and unblemished.

It would be so easy, if she had not to see him again. How could she resist him, if he could so much as touch her hand? But if she were defended from him, she could bury his love and

pray for him in the memory of the thing dead. All that, if she but let that heavy breathing go on a little longer, if she did not raise her hand and set a glass to those grey, parted lips.

They were parted now. The laboured breath was drawn through the teeth. The eyelids were a little raised, and showed but the white of the upturned eyes.

Maria stared fixedly into the pinched face, and a new horror came upon her.

It was murder she was doing. Nothing less. The power to save was there, and she would not use it. No — it could not be murder — it was not possible that she could do murder.

Still with wide eyes she stared. Surely the heavy breath had come more quickly a moment ago. It seemed an age between each rise and fall of the coverlet. There was a ghastly whistling sound of it between the teeth.

It was slower still. The eyelids were gradually opening — the blind white was horrible to see. Each breath was a convulsion that shook the frail body.

It was murder. Her hand shot out like lightning and seized the small bottle. Let anything come, — love, shame, heaven, damnation; it should not be murder.

She forced the unstoppered bottle into the dying woman's mouth with a desperate hand.

The next breath was drawn with a choking effort. The whole body stirred. The thin hand appeared, grasped the coverlet with distorting energy, and then lay almost still, twitching convulsively second by second. Still Maria tried wildly to pour more of the stimulant between the set teeth. When they parted, no breath came, and the fingers only moved once more, for the very last time.

It was not murder, but it was death. The wasted old woman had outlived by two or three hours the strong, young peasant girl, and fate had laid her hand heavily upon the life of Maria Addolorata.

CHAPTER XV.

When Dalrymple came home that evening, he found his supper already on the table and half cold. Sora Nanna was busier than her daughter, and less patient of the Scotchman's irregularities. If he could not come home at a reasonable hour, he must not expect her to keep everything waiting for him.

He sat down to the table without even going upstairs as usual to wash his hands, simply because the cooked meat would be cold and greasy if he let it stand five minutes longer. Being once seated in his place, he did not move for a long time. Sora Nanna came in more than once. She was very much preoccupied about the load of wine which her husband had ordered to be sent, and which, if possible, she meant to send off before morning, for she did not wish him to be absent in Rome with money in his pocket a day longer than necessary.

Gloomy and preoccupied, without even a book before him, Dalrymple sat with his back to the wall, drinking his wine in silence, and staring at the lamp. Sora Nanna asked him whether he had

seen Annetta. He shook his head without speaking. The woman observed that the girls were quite capable of spending a second night at Civitella to prolong the festivities. Dalrymple nodded, not caring at all.

Annetta being absent, Gigetto had not thought it necessary to put in an appearance. But Sora Nanna wished to see him again about the wine. With a grin, she asked Dalrymple whether he would keep house if she went out for half an hour. Again he nodded in silence. He heard her lock from the inside the door which opened from the staircase upon the street, for it was already late. Then she came through the common room again, with her overskirt over her head, went out, and left the door ajar. Dalrymple was alone in the house, unaware that Annetta was lying dead on the floor of his room upstairs.

Sora Nanna had not been gone a quarter of an hour when a boy came in from the street. Dalrymple knew him, for he was the son of the convent gardener.

The lad said that Dalrymple was wanted immediately, as the abbess was very ill. That was all he knew. He was rather a dull boy, and he repeated mechanically what he had been told. The Scotchman started and was about to speak, when he checked himself. He asked the boy two or three questions, in the hope of getting more accurate

information, but could only elicit a repetition of the message. He was wanted immediately, as the abbess was very ill.

He covered his eyes with his hand for a few seconds. In a flash he saw that if he were ever to carry off Maria Addolorata, it must be to-night. The chances were a hundred to one that if there were another crisis, the abbess would be dead before he could reach the convent. Once dead, there was no knowing what might happen in the confusion that would ensue, and during the elaborate funeral ceremonies. The man had that daring temper that rises at obstacles as an eagle at a crag, without the slightest hesitation. When he dropped his hand upon the table he had made up his mind.

It was generally easy to get a good mule at any hour of the night in Subiaco. The mules were in their stables then. In the daytime it would have been very doubtful, when most of them were away in the vineyards, or carrying loads to the neighbouring towns. The convent gardener, who was well-to-do in the world, had a very good mule, as Dalrymple knew, and its stable was half-way up the ascent. The boy could saddle it with the pack-saddle without any difficulty, and meet him anywhere he chose. Dalrymple's reputation was excellent as a liberal foreigner who paid well, and the gardener would not blame the boy for saddling the mule without leave.

In a few words Dalrymple explained what he wanted, and to help the lad's understanding he gave him some coppers which filled the little fellow with energy and delight. The boy was to be at the top of the mule path leading down from above the convent to the valley in half an hour. Dalrymple told him that he wished to go to Tivoli, and that the boy could come with him if he chose, after the visit to the abbess was over. The boy ran away to saddle the mule.

Dalrymple rose quickly, and shut the street door in order to take the lamp with him to his room, and not to leave the house open with no light in it. The case was urgent. He went upstairs, carrying the lamp, and opened the door of his quarters. Instantly he recognized the faint, sickly odour of hydrocyanide of potassium, and remembered that he had left the bottle with the solution on his table that afternoon in his hurry. Then he looked down and saw a white face upon the floor, and the flowered bodice and smart skirt of the peasant girl.

He had solid nerves, and possessed that perfect indifference to death as a phenomenon which most medical men acquire in the dissecting-room. But he was shocked when, bending down, and setting the lamp upon the floor, he saw in a few seconds that Annetta had been dead some time. He even shook his head a little, very slowly, which meant a

great deal for his hard nature. Glancing at the unstoppered bottle and at the empty glass, side by side on the table, he understood at once that the girl, intentionally or by mistake, had swallowed enough of the poison to kill half-a-dozen strong men. He remembered instantly how he had once given her spirits of camphor when she had felt ill, and he understood all the circumstances in a moment, almost as though he had seen them.

Scarcely thinking of what he was doing, though with an effort which any one who has attempted to lift a dead body from the ground will understand, he took up the lifeless girl, stiff and stark as she was, and laid her upon his own bed. It was a mere instinct of humanity. Then he went back and took the lamp and held it near her face, and shook his head again, thoughtfully. A word of pity escaped his lips, spoken very low.

He set the lamp down on the floor by the bedside, for there was no small table near. There never is, in peasants' houses. He began to walk up and down the room, thinking over the situation, which was grave enough.

Suddenly he smelt the acrid odour of burning cotton. He turned quickly, and saw that he had placed the three-beaked lamp so near to the bed that the overhanging coverlet was directly above one of the flames, and was already smouldering. He smothered it with the stuff itself between his

hands, brought the lamp into the laboratory, and set it upon the table.

Then, realizing that his own case was urgent, he began to make his preparations. He took a clean bottle and poured thirty-five drops of laudanum into it, put in the stopper, and thrust it into his pocket. Unlocking another box, he took out some papers and a canvas bag of gold, such as bankers used to give travellers in those times when it was necessary to take a large supply of cash for a journey. He threw on his cloak, took his plaid over one arm and went back into his bedroom, carrying the lamp in the other hand. Then he hesitated, sniffing the air and the smell of the burnt cotton. Suddenly an idea seemed to cross his mind, for he put down the lamp and dropped his plaid upon a chair. He stood still a moment longer, looking at the dead girl as she lay on the bed, biting his lip thoughtfully, and nodding his head once or twice. He made a step towards the bed, then hesitated once more, and then made up his mind.

He went back to the bedside, and stooping a little lifted the body on his arms as though judging of its weight and of his power to carry it. His first instinct had been to lock the door of the room behind him, and to go up to the convent, leaving the dead girl where she was, whether he were destined to come back that night, or never. A

moment's reflection had told him that if he did so he must certainly be accused of having poisoned her. He meant, if it were possible, to take Maria Addolorata on board of the English man-of-war at Civita Vecchia within twenty-four hours. So far as the carrying off of a nun was concerned, he would be safe on the ship; but if he were accused of murder, no matter how falsely, the captain would have a right to refuse his protection, even though he was Dalrymple's friend. A little chain of circumstances had led him to form a plan, in a flash, which, if successfully carried out, would account both for the disappearance of Annetta herself, and of Maria Addolorata as well.

His eyelids contracted slightly, and his great jaw set itself with the determination to overcome all obstacles. In a few seconds he had divested the dead girl of her heavy bodice and skirt and carpet apron and heavy shoes. He rolled the things into a bundle, tossed them into the laboratory, locked the door of the latter, and stuck the key into his pocket. He carefully stopped the bottle containing the remainder of the prussiate of potassium, and took that also. Then he rolled the body up carefully in his great plaid, mummy-like, and tied the ends of the shawl with shoe-laces which he had among his things. He drew his soft hat firmly down upon his forehead, and threw his cloak over his left shoulder. He lifted the body

off the bed. It was so stark that it stood upright beside him. With his right arm round its waist, he raised it so high that he could walk freely, and he drew his wide cloak over it as well as he could, and freed his left hand. He grasped the lamp as he passed the table, listened at the door, though he knew that the house was locked below, and he cautiously and with difficulty descended the stairs.

Just inside the street door of the staircase there was a niche, as there is in almost all old Italian houses. He set the body in it, and went into the common room with the lamp. Taking the bottle with the laudanum in it from his pocket, he filled it more than half full of aniseed cordial, of which a decanter stood with other liquors upon a sideboard, as usual in such places. He returned it to his pocket, and listened again. Then he assured himself that he had all he needed — the bottle, money, his cloak, and a short, broad knife which he always took with him on his walks, more for the sake of cutting a loaf of bread if he stopped for refreshment than for any other purpose. His passport he had taken with his few other valuable papers from the box.

He left the lamp on the table, and unlocked the street door, though he did not pull it open. Brave as he was, his heart beat fast, for it was the first decisive moment. If Sora Nanna should come

home within the next sixty seconds, there would be trouble. But there was no sound.

In the dark he went back to the door of the staircase, unlocked it, and opened it wide, looking out. The heavy clouds had so darkened the moonlight that he could hardly see. But the street was quiet, for it was late, and there were no watchmen in Subiaco at that time. A moment later, the door was closed behind him, and he was disappearing round the dark corner with Annetta's body in his arms, all wrapped with himself in his great cloak.

It was a long and terrible climb. A weaker man would have fainted or given it up long before Dalrymple set his foot firmly upon the narrow beaten path which ran along between the garden wall at the back of the convent, and the precipitous descent on his left. The sweat ran down over his hard, pale face in the dark, as he shook off his cloak and laid down his ghastly burden under the deep shadow of the low postern. He shook his big shoulders and wiped his brow, and stretched out his long arms, doubling them and stretching them again, for they were benumbed and asleep with the protracted effort. But so far it was done, and no one had met him. There had been little chance of that, but he was glad, all the same. And if, down at the house, any one went to his room, nothing would be found. He had the key of the little laboratory in his pocket. It would be long before

they broke down the door and found Annetta's skirt and bodice and shoes wrapped together in a corner.

He went on up the ascent five minutes further, walking as though on air now that he carried no weight in his arms. At the top of the mule path the lad was already waiting for him with the mule. He told the little fellow that he might have to wait half an hour longer, as he must go into the convent to see the abbess before starting for Tivoli. He bid him tie the mule by the halter to the low branch of an overhanging fig-tree, and sit down to wait.

"It is a cool night," said Dalrymple, though he was hot enough himself. "Drink this, my boy."

He gave him the little bottle of aniseed, opening it as he did so. The boy smelt it and knew that it was good, for it is a common drink in the mountains. He drank half of it, pouring it into his mouth with a gurgling sound.

"Drink it all," said Dalrymple. "I brought it for you."

The boy did not hesitate, but drained it to the last drop, and handed the bottle back without a word. Dalrymple made him sit down near the mule's head, well aside from the path, in case any one should pass. He knew that between the unaccustomed dose of spirits and the thirty-five drops of opium, the lad would be sound asleep before long. For the rest, there was nothing to be done

but to trust to luck. He had done the impossible already, so far as physical effort was concerned, but Fortune must not thwart him at the end. If she did, he had in his other pocket enough left of what had killed Annetta to settle his own affairs forever, and he might need it. At that moment he was absolutely desperate. It would be ill for any one who crossed his path that night.

CHAPTER XVI.

Dalrymple wrapped his cloak about him once more, as he turned away, and retraced his steps by the garden wall. He glanced at the long dark thing that lay in the shadow of the postern, as he went by. It was not probable that it would be noticed, even if any one should pass that way, which was unlikely, between ten o'clock at night and three in the morning. He went on without stopping, and in three or four minutes he had gone round the convent to the main entrance, next to the church. He rang the bell. The portress was expecting him, and he was admitted without a word.

He found Maria Addolorata in the antechamber of the abbess's apartment, veiled, and standing with folded hands in the middle of the little hall. She must have heard the distant clang of the bell, for she was evidently waiting for him.

"Am I in time?" he asked in a tone of anxiety.

She shook her head slowly.

"Is she dead?"

"She was dead before I sent for you," answered Maria Addolorata, in a low and almost solemn tone. "No one knows it yet."

"I feared so," said Dalrymple.

He made a step towards the door of the parlour, naturally expecting that Maria would speak with him there, as usual. But she stepped back and placed herself in his way.

"No," she said briefly.

"Why not?" he asked in quick surprise.

She raised her finger to her veiled lips, and then pointed to the other door, to warn him that the portress was there and was almost within hearing. With quick suspicion he understood that she was keeping him in the antechamber to defend herself, that she had not been able to resist the desire to see him once more, and that she intended this to be their last meeting.

"Maria," he began, but he only pronounced her name, and stopped short, for a great fear took him by the throat.

"Yes," she answered, in her calm, low voice. "I have made up my mind. I will not go. God will perhaps forgive me what I have done. I will pray for forgiveness. But I will not do more evil. I will not bring shame upon my father's house, even for love of you."

Her voice trembled a little at the last words. Even veiled as she was, the vital magnetism of the man was creeping upon her already. She had resolved that she would see him once more, that she would tell him the plain truth that was right,

that she would bid him farewell, and promise to pray for him, as she must pray for herself. But she had sworn to herself that she would not speak of love. Yet with the first words she spoke, the word and the vibration of love had come too. Her hands disappeared in her sleeves, and her nails pressed the flesh in the determination to be strong. She little guessed the tremendous argument he had in store.

"It is hard to speak here," he said. "Let us go into the parlour."

She shook her head, and again moved backwards a step, so that her shoulders were almost against the door.

"You must say what you have to say here," she answered after a moment's pause, and she felt strong again. "For my part, I have spoken. May God forget me in my utmost need if I go with you."

Dalrymple seemed little moved by the solemn invocation. It meant little enough to him.

"I must tell you a short story," he replied quietly. "Unless I tell you, you cannot understand. I have set my life upon your love, and I have gone so far that I cannot save my life except by you — my life and my honour. Will you listen to me?"

She nodded, and he heard her draw a quick breath. Then he began his story, putting it to-

gether clearly, from the facts he knew, in very few words. He told her how Annetta must have mistaken the bottle on his table for camphor, and how he had found her dead. Nothing would save him from the accusation of having murdered the girl but the absolute disappearance of her body. Maria shuddered and turned her head quickly when he told her that the body was lying under the postern arch behind the garden wall. He told her, too, that the boy was by this time asleep beside the mule on the path beyond. Then he told her of his plan, which was short, desperate, and masterly.

"You must tell no one that the abbess is dead," he said. "Go out through your cell into the garden, as soon as I am gone, and when I tap at the postern open the door. Leave a lamp in your cell. I will do the rest."

"What will you do?" asked Maria, in a low and wondering tone.

"You must lock the door of your cell on the inside and leave the lamp there," said Dalrymple. "You will wait for me in the garden by the gate. I will carry the poor girl's body in and lay it in your bed. Then I will set fire to the bed itself. Of course there is an under-mattress of maize leaves —there always is. I will leave the lamp standing on the floor by the bedside. I will shut the door and come out to you, and I can manage to slip the

bolt of the garden gate from the outside by propping up the spring from within. You shall see."

"It is horrible!" gasped Maria. "And I do not see —"

"It is simple, and nothing else can save my life. Your cell is of course a mere stone vault, and the fire cannot spread. The sisters are asleep, except the portress, who will be far away. Long before they break down your door, the body will be charred by the fire beyond all recognition. They will see the lamp standing close by, and will suppose that you lay down to rest, leaving the lamp close to you — too close; that the abbess died while you were asleep, and that you had caught fire before you waked; that you were burned to death, in fact. The body will be buried as yours, and you will be legally dead. Consequently there will not be the slightest suspicion upon your good name. As for me, it will be supposed that I have procured other clothes for Annetta, thrown hers into the laboratory and carried her off. In due time I will send her father a large sum of money without comment. If you refuse, I must either be arrested, convicted, and sentenced to death for the murder of a girl who killed herself without my knowledge, or, as is probable, I shall go out now, sit down in a quiet place, and be found dead in the morning. It is certain death to me in either case. It would be absolutely impossible for me to get rid

of the dead body without arousing suspicion. If it is wrong to save oneself by burning a dead body, it is not a great wrong, and I take it upon myself. It is the only wrong in the matter, unless it is wrong to love you and to be willing to die for you. Do you understand me?"

Leaning back against the door of the parlour, Maria Addolorata had almost unconsciously lifted her veil and was gazing into his eyes. The plan was horrible, but she could not help admiring the man's strength and daring. In his voice, even when he told her that he loved her, there was that quiet courage which imposes itself upon men and women alike. The whole situation was as clear as day to her in a moment, for all his calculations were absolutely correct, — the fire-proof vault of the cell, the certainty that the body would be taken for hers, above all, the assurance of her own supposed death, with the utter freedom from suspicion which it would mean for her ever afterwards. Was she not to be buried with Christian burial, mourned as dead, and freed in one hour from all the consequences of her life? It was masterly, though there was a horror in it.

She loved him more than her own soul. It was the fear of bringing shame upon her father and mother that had held her, far more than any spiritual dread. It was not strange that she should waver again when he had unfolded his scheme.

She turned, opened the door, and led him into the parlour, where the silver lamp was burning brightly.

"You must tell it all again," she said, still standing. "I must be quite sure that I understand."

He knew well enough that she had finally yielded, since she went so far. In his mind he quickly ran over the details of the plan once more, and mentally settled what still remained to be decided. But since she wished it, he went over all he had said already. Being able to speak in his natural voice without fear of being overheard by the portress, and feeling sure of the result, he spoke far more easily and more eloquently. Before he had finished he was holding her hand in his, and she was gazing intently into his eyes.

"It is life or death for me," he said, when he had told her everything. "Which shall it be?"

She was silent for a moment. Then her strong mouth smiled strangely.

"It shall be life for you, if I lose my soul for it," she said.

She felt the quick thrill and pressure of his hand, and all the man's tremendous energy was alive again.

"Then let us do it quickly," he answered. "I will go out with the portress. Go to your cell before we reach the end of the corridor, and shut the door with some noise. She will remember it after-

wards. Wait at the garden gate till I tap softly, and leave the rest to me. There is no danger. Do not be afraid."

"Afraid!" she exclaimed proudly. "How little you know me! It never was fear that held me. Besides — with you!"

The two last words told him more than all she had ever said before, and for the first time he wholly trusted her. Besides, it was to be only for a few minutes, while he went out by the front gate and walked round to the back of the convent. The plan was so well conceived that it could not fail when put into execution.

They shook hands, as two people who have agreed to do a desperate deed, each for the other's sake. Then as their grasp loosened, Dalrymple turned towards the door, but turned again almost instantly and took her in his arms, and kissed her as men kiss women they love when their lives are in the balance. Then he went out, passed through the antechamber, and found the portress waiting for him as usual. She took up her little lamp and led the way in silence. A moment later he heard Maria come out and enter her cell, closing the door loudly behind her.

"Her most reverend excellency is in no danger now," he said to the portress, with Scotch veracity.

"Sister Maria Addolorata may then rest a little," answered the lay sister, who rarely spoke.

"Precisely so," said Dalrymple, drily.

Five minutes later he was at the garden gate, tapping softly. Immediately the door yielded to his gentle pressure, for Maria had already unfastened the lock within.

"Stand aside a little," said Dalrymple, in a whisper. "You need not see — it is not a pretty sight. Keep the door shut till I come back. Where is your cell?"

She pointed to a door that was open above the level of the garden. A little light came out. With womanly caution she had set the lamp in the corner behind the door when she had opened it, so as to show as little as possible from without.

She turned her head away as he passed her with his heavy burden, treading softly upon the hard, dry ground. But he was not half across the garden before she looked after him. She could not help it. The dark thing he carried in his arms attracted her, and a shudder ran through her. She closed the gate, and stood with her hand on the lock.

It seemed to her that he was gone an interminable time. Though the moon was now high, the clouds were so black that the garden was almost quite dark. Suddenly she heard his step, and he was nearer than she thought.

"It is burning well," he said with grim brevity.

He stooped and looked closely in the dimness at the old-fashioned lock. It was made as he sup-

posed and could be easily slipped from without. He found a pebble under his foot, raised the spring, and placed the small stone under it, after examining the position of the cracks in the wood, which were many.

"There is plenty of time, now," he said, and he gently pushed her out upon the narrow walk, drawing the door after him.

With his big knife, working through the widest crack he teazed the bolt into the socket. Then with his shoulder he softly shook the whole door. He heard the spring fall into its place, as the pebble dropped upon the dry ground.

"No human being can suspect that the door has been opened," he said.

He wrapped her in his long cloak, standing beside her under the wall. Very gently he pushed the veil and bands away from her golden hair. She helped him, and he kissed the soft locks. Then about her head he laid his plaid in folds and drew it forward over her shoulders. She let him do it, not realizing what service the shawl had but lately done.

They walked forward. The boy was fast asleep and did not move. The mule stamped a little as they came up. Dalrymple lifted Maria upon the pack-saddle, sideways, and stretched the packing-cords behind her back.

"Hold on," he said. "I will lead the mule."

So it was all over, and the deed was done, for good or evil. But it was for evil, for it was a bad deed.

To the last, fortune favoured Dalrymple and Maria, and everything took place after their flight just as the strong man had anticipated. Not a trace of the truth was left behind. Early in the morning the abbess was found dead, and in the little cell near by, upon the still smouldering remains of the mattress, lay the charred and burned form of a woman. In Stefanone's house, the little bundle of clothes in the locked laboratory was all that was left of Annetta. All Subiaco said that the Englishman had carried off the peasant girl to his own country.

Up at the convent the nuns buried the abbess in great state, with catafalque and canopy, with hundreds of wax candles and endless funeral singing. They buried also another body with less magnificence, but with more pomp than would have been bestowed upon any of the other sisters, and not long afterwards a marble tablet in the wall of the church set forth in short good Latin sentences, how the Sister Maria Addolorata, of many virtues, had been burned to death in her bed on the eve of the feast of Saint Luke the Evangelist, and all good Christians were enjoined to pray for her soul — which indeed was in need of their prayers.

Stefanone returned from Rome, but it was a sad

home-coming when he found that his daughter was gone, and unconsciously he repeated the very words she had last spoken when she was dying in Dalrymple's room all alone.

"An evil death on you and all your house!" he said, shaking his fist at the door of the room.

And Stefanone swore within himself solemnly that the Englishman should pay the price. And he and his paid it in full, and more also, after years had passed, even to generations then unborn.

This is the first act, as it were, of all the story, and between this one and the beginning of the next a few years must pass quickly, if not altogether in silence.

Part II.

GLORIA DALRYMPLE.

CHAPTER XVII.

In the year 1861 Donna Francesca Campodonico was already a widow. Her husband, Don Girolamo Campodonico, had died within two years of their marriage, which had been one of interest and convenience so far as he had been concerned, for Donna Francesca was rich, whereas he had been but a younger son and poor. His elder brother was the Duca di Norba, the father of another Girolamo, who succeeded him many years later, of Gianforte Campodonico, and of the beautiful Bianca, in whose short, sad life Pietro Ghisleri afterwards held so large a part. But of these latter persons, some were then not yet born, and others were in their infancy, so that they play no part in this portion of the present history.

Donna Francesca was of the great Braccio family, the last of a collateral branch. She had inherited a very considerable estate, which, if she had no descendants, was to revert to the Princes of Gerano. She had married Don Girolamo in obedience to her guardians' advice, but not at all against her will, and she had become deeply attached to him during the short two years of their married

life. He had never been strong, since his childhood, his constitution having been permanently injured by a violent attack of malarious fever when he had been a mere boy. A second fever, even more severe than the first, caught on a shooting expedition near Fiumicino, had killed him, and Donna Francesca was left a childless widow, in full possession of her own fortune and of a little more in the shape of a small jointure. It was thought that she would marry again before very long, but it was too soon to expect this as yet.

Among her possessions as the last of her branch of the Braccio family, of which the main line, however, was sufficiently well represented, was the small but beautiful palace in which she now lived alone. It was situated between the Capitoline Hill and the Tiber, surrounded on three sides by dark and narrow streets, but facing a small square in which there was an ancient church. When it is said that the palace was a small one, its dimensions are compared with the great Roman palaces, more than one of which could easily lodge a thousand persons. It was built on the same general plan as most of them, with a ground floor having heavily barred windows; a state apartment in the first story, with three stone balconies on the front; a very low second story above that, but not coextensive with it, because two of the great state rooms were higher than the rest and had clere-

story windows; and last of all, a third story consisting of much higher rooms than the second, and having a spacious attic under the sloping roof, which was, of course, covered with red tiles in the old fashion. The palace, at that time known as the Palazzo, or 'Palazzetto,' Borgia, was externally a very good specimen of Renascence architecture of the period when the florid, 'barocco' style had not yet got the upper hand in Rome. The great arched entrance for carriages was well proportioned, the stone carvings were severe rather than graceful, the cornices had great nobility both of proportion and design. The lower story was built of rough-faced blocks of travertine stone, above which the masonry was smooth. The whole palace was of that warm, time-toned colour, which travertine takes with age, and which is, therefore, peculiar to old Roman buildings.

Within, though it could not be said that any part had exactly fallen to decay, there were many rooms which had been long disused, in which the old frescoes and architectural designs in grey and white, and bits of bold perspective painted in the vaults and embrasures, were almost obliterated by time, and in which such furniture as there was could not survive much longer. About one-half of the state apartment, comprising, perhaps, fifteen or twenty rooms, large and small, had been occupied by Donna Francesca and her husband, and she now lived in

them alone. In that part of the palace there was a sort of quiet and stately luxury, the result of her own taste, which was strongly opposed to the gaudy fashions then introduced from Paris at the height of the Second Empire's importance. Girolamo Campodonico had been aware that his young wife's judgment was far better than his own in artistic matters, and had left all such questions entirely to her.

She had taken much pleasure in unearthing from attics and disused rooms all such objects as possessed any intrinsic artistic value, such as old carved furniture, tapestries, and the like. Whatever she found worth keeping she had caused to be restored just so far as to be useful, and she had known how to supply the deficiencies with modern material in such a way as not to destroy the harmony of the whole.

It should be sufficiently clear from these facts that Donna Francesca Campodonico was a woman of taste and culture, in the modern sense. Indeed, the satisfaction of her tastes occupied a much more important place in her existence than her social obligations, and had a far greater influence upon her subsequent life. Her favourite scheme was to make her palace at all points as complete within as its architect had made it outside, and she had it in her power to succeed in doing so. She was not, as some might think, a great exception in those days. Within the narrow limits of a certain class,

in which the hereditary possession of masterpieces has established artistic intelligence as a stamp of caste, no people, until recently, have had a better taste than the Italians; as no people, beyond these limits, have ever had a worse. There was nothing very unusual in Donna Francesca's views, except her constant and industrious energy in carrying them out. Even this might be attributed to the fact that she had inherited a beautiful but dilapidated palace, which she was desirous of improving until, on a small scale, it should be like the houses of the great old families, such as the Saracinesca, the Savelli, the Frangipani, and her own near relatives, the Princes of Gerano.

She had an invaluable ally in her artistic enterprises in the person of an artist, who, in a sort of way, was considered as belonging to Casa Braccio, though his extraordinary talent had raised him far above the position of a dependent of the family, in which he had been born as the son of the steward of the ancient castle and estate of Gerano. As constantly happened in those days, the clever boy had been noticed by the Prince, —or, perhaps, thrust into notice by his father, who was reasonably proud of him. The lad had been taken out of his surroundings and thoroughly educated for the priesthood in Rome, but by the time he had attained to the age necessary for ordination, his artistic gifts had developed to such an

extent that in spite of his father's disappointment, even the old Prince — the brother of Sister Maria Addolorata — advised Angelo Reanda to give up the Church, and to devote himself altogether to painting.

Young Reanda had been glad enough of the change in his prospects. Many eminent Italians have begun life in a similar way. Cardinal Antonelli was not the only one, for there have been Italian prime ministers as well as dignitaries of the Church, whose origin was as humble and who owed their subsequent distinction to the kindly interest bestowed on them by nobles on whose estates their parents were mere peasants, very far inferior in station to Angelo Reanda's father, a man of a certain education, occupying a position of trust and importance.

Nor was Reanda's priestly education anything but an advantage to him, so far as his career was concerned, however much it had raised him above the class in which he had been born. So far as latinity and rhetoric were to be counted he was better educated than his father's master; for with the same advantages he had greater talents, greater originality, and greater industry. As an artist, his mental culture made him the intellectual superior of most of his contemporaries. As a man, ten years of close association with the sons of gentlemen had easily enough made a gentleman of one

whose instincts were naturally as refined as his character was sensitive and upright.

Donna Francesca, as the last of her branch of the family and an orphan at an early age, had of course been brought up in the house of her relatives of Gerano, and from her childhood had known Reanda's father, and Angelo himself, who was fully ten years older than she. Some of his first paintings had been done in the great Braccio palace, and many a time, as a mere girl, she had watched him at his work, perched upon a scaffolding, as he decorated the vault of the main hall. She could not remember the time when she had not heard him spoken of as a young genius, and she could distinctly recall the discussion which had taken place when his fate had been decided for him, and when he had been at last told that he might become an artist if he chose. At that time she had looked upon him with a sort of wondering admiration in which there was much real friendly feeling, and as she grew up and saw what he could do, and learned to appreciate it, she silently determined that he should one day help her to restore the dilapidated Palazzetto Borgia, where her father and mother had died in her infancy, and which she loved with that sort of tender attachment which children brought up by distant relations often feel for whatever has belonged to their own dimly remembered parents.

There was a natural intimacy between the young girl and the artist. Long ago she had played at ball with him in the great courtyard of the Gerano castle, when he had been at home for his holidays, wearing a black cassock and a three-cornered hat, like a young priest. Then, all at once, instead of a priest he had been a painter, dressed like other men and working in the house in which she lived. She had played with his colours, had scrawled with his charcoals upon the white plastered walls, had asked him questions, and had talked with him about the famous pictures in the Braccio gallery. And all this had happened not once, but many times in the course of years. Then she had unfolded to him her schemes about her own little palace, and he had promised to help her, by and bye, half jesting, half in earnest. She would give him rooms in the upper story to live in, she said, disposing of everything beforehand. He should be close to his work, and have it under his hand always until it was finished. And when there was no more to do, he might still live there and have his studio at the top of the old house, with an entrance of his own, leading by a narrow staircase to one of the dark streets at the back. She had noticed all sorts of peculiarities of the building in her occasional visits to it with the governess, — as, for instance, that there was a convenient interior staircase leading from the great hall to the upper

story, by a door once painted like the wall, and hard to find, but now hanging on its hinges and hideously apparent. The great hall must all be painted again, and Angelo could live overhead and come down to his work by those steps. With childish pleasure she praised her own ingenuity in so arranging matters beforehand. Angelo was to help her in all she did, until the Palazzetto Borgia should be as beautiful as the Palazzo Braccio itself, though of course it was much smaller. Then she scrawled on the walls again, trying to explain to him, in childishly futile sketches, her ideas of decoration, and he would come down from his scaffold and do his best with a few broad lines to show her what she had really imagined, till she clapped her small, dusty hands with delight and was ultimately carried off by her governess to be made presentable for her daily drive in the Villa Borghese with the Princess of Gerano.

As a girl Francesca had the rare gift of seeing clearly in her mind what she wanted, and at last she had found herself possessed of the power to carry out her intentions. As a matter of course she had taken Reanda into her confidence as her chief helper, and the intimacy which dated from her childhood had continued on very much the same footing. His talent had grown and been consolidated by ten years of good work, and she, as a young married woman, had understood what she

had meant when she had been a child. Reanda was now admittedly, in his department, the first painter in Rome, and that was fame in those days. His high education and general knowledge of all artistic matters made him an interesting companion in such work as Francesca had undertaken, and he had, moreover, a personal charm of manner and voice which had always attracted her.

No one, perhaps, would have called him a handsome man, and at this time he was no longer in his first youth. He was tall, thin, and very dark, though his black beard had touches of a deep gold-brown colour in it, which contrasted a little with his dusky complexion. He had a sad face, with deep, lustreless, thoughtful eyes, which seemed to peer inward rather than outward. In the olive skin there were heavy brown shadows, and the bony prominence of the brow left hollows at the temples, from which the fine black hair grew with a backward turn which gave something unusual to his expression. The aquiline nose which characterizes so many Roman faces, was thin and delicate, with sensitive nostrils that often moved when he was speaking. The eyebrows were irregular and thick, extending in a dark down beyond the lower angles of the forehead, and almost meeting between the eyes; but the somewhat gloomy expression which this gave him was modified by a certain sensitive grace of the mouth, little hidden by the

thin black moustache or by the beard, which did not grow up to the lower lip, though it was thick and silky from the chin downwards.

It was a thoughtful face, but there was creative power in the high forehead, as there was direct energy in the long arms and lean, nervous hands. Donna Francesca liked to watch him at his work, as she had watched him when she was a little girl. Now and then, but very rarely, the lustreless eyes lighted up, just before he put in some steady, determining stroke which brought out the meaning of the design. There was a quick fire in them then, at the instant when the main idea was outwardly expressed, and if she spoke to him inadvertently at such a moment, he never answered her at once, and sometimes forgot to answer her at all. For his art was always first with him. She knew it, and she liked him the better for it.

The intimacy between the great lady and the artist was, indeed, founded upon this devotion of his to his painting, but it was sustained by a sort of community of interests extending far back into darker ages, when his forefathers had been bondsmen to her ancestors in the days of serfdom. He had grown up with the clearly defined sensation of belonging with, if not to, the house of Braccio. His father had been a trusty and trusted dependent of the family, and he had imbibed as a mere child its hereditary likes and dislikes, its traditions wise

and foolish, together with an indomitable pride in its high fortunes and position in the world. And Francesca herself was a true Braccio, though she was descended from a collateral branch, and, next to the Prince of Gerano, had been to Reanda by far the most important person bearing the name. She had admired him when she had been a child, had encouraged him as she grew up, and now she provided his genius with employment, and gave him her friendship as a solace and delight both in work and idleness. It is said that only Italians can be admitted to such a position with the certainty that they will not under any circumstances presume upon it. To Angelo Reanda it meant much more than to most men who could have been placed as he was. His genius raised him far above the class in which he had been born, and his education, with his natural and acquired refinement, placed him on a higher level than the majority of other Roman artists, who, in the Rome of that day, inhabited a Bohemia of their own which has completely disappeared. Their ideas and conversation, when they were serious, interested him, but their manners were not his, and their gaiety was frankly distasteful to him. He associated with them as an artist, but not as a companion, and he particularly disliked their wives and daughters, who, in their turn, found him too 'serious' for their society, to use the time-honoured Italian expression. Never-

theless, his natural gentleness of disposition made him treat them all alike with quiet courtesy, and when, as often happened, he was obliged to be in their company, he honestly endeavoured to be one of them as far as he could.

On the other hand, he had no footing in the society to which Francesca belonged, but for which she cared so little. There were, indeed, one or two houses where he was received, as he was at Casa Braccio, in a manner which, for the very reason that it was familiar, proved his social inferiority — where he addressed the head of the house as 'Excellency' and was called 'Reanda' by everybody, elders and juniors alike, where he was appreciated as an artist, respected as a man, and welcomed occasionally as a guest when no other outsider was present, but where he was not looked upon as a personage to be invited even with the great throng on state occasions. He was as far from receiving such cold acknowledgments of social existence as those who received them and nothing else were distantly removed from intimacy on an equal footing.

He did not complain of such treatment, nor even inwardly resent it. The friendliness shown him was as real as the kindness he had received throughout his early youth from the Prince of Gerano, and he was not the man to undervalue it because he had not a drop of gentle blood in his veins. But

his refined nature craved refined intercourse, and preferred solitude to what he could get in any lower sphere. The desire for the atmosphere of the uppermost class, rather than the mere wish to appear as one of its members, often belongs to the artistic temperament, and many artists are unjustly disliked by their fellows and pointed at as snobs because they prefer, as an atmosphere, inane elegance to inelegant intellectuality. It is often forgotten by those who calumniate them that hereditary elegance, no matter how empty-headed, is the result of an hereditary cultivation of what is thought beautiful, and that the vainest, silliest woman who dresses well by instinct is an artist in her way.

In Francesca Campodonico there was much more than such superficial taste, and in her Reanda found the only true companion he had ever known. He might have been for twenty years the intimate friend of all Roman society without meeting such another, and he knew it, and appreciated his good fortune. For he was not naturally a dissatisfied man, nor at all given to complain of his lot. Few men are, who have active, creative genius, and whose profession gives them all the scope they need. Of late years, too, Francesca had treated him with a sort of deference which he got from no one else in the world. He realized that she did, without attempting to account for the fact, which,

indeed, depended on something past his comprehension.

He felt for her something like veneration. The word does not express exactly the attitude of his mind towards her, but no other defines his position so well. He was not in love with her in the Italian sense of the expression, for he did not conceive it possible that she should ever love him, whereas he told himself that he might possibly marry, if he found a wife to his taste, and be in love with his wife without in the least infringing upon his devotion to Donna Francesca.

That she was young and lovely, if not beautiful, he saw and knew. He even admitted unconsciously that if she had been an old woman he could not have 'venerated' her as he did, though veneration, as such, is the due of the old rather than of the young. Her spiritual eyes and virginal face were often before him in his dreams and waking thoughts. There was a maidenlike modesty, as it were, even about her graceful bodily self, which belonged, in his imagination, to a saint upon an altar, rather than to a statue upon a pedestal. There was something in the sweep of her soft dark brown hair which suggested that it would be sacrilege and violence for a man's hand to touch it. There was a dewy delicacy on her young lips, as though they could kiss nothing more earthly than a newly opened flower, already above the earth, but not

yet touched by the sun. There was a thoughtful turn of modelling in the smooth, white forehead, which it was utterly beyond Reanda's art to reproduce, often as he had tried. He thought a great sculptor might succeed, and it was the one thing which made him sometimes wish that he had taken the chisel for his tool, instead of the brush.

She was never considered one of the great beauties of Rome. She had not the magnificent presence and colouring of her kinswoman, Maria Addolorata, whose tragic death in the convent of Subiaco — a fictitious tragedy accepted as real by all Roman society — had given her a special place in the history of the Braccio family. She had not the dark and queenly splendour of Corona d'Astradente, her contemporary and the most beautiful woman of her time. But she had, for those who loved her, something which was quite her own and which placed her beyond them in some ways and, in any case, out of competition for the homage received by the great beauties. No one recognized this more fully than Angelo Reanda, and he would as soon have thought of being in love with her, as men love women, as he would have imagined that his father, for instance, could have loved Maria Addolorata, the Carmelite nun.

The one human point in his devoted adoration lay in his terror lest Francesca Campodonico should die young and leave him to grow old without her. He sometimes told her so.

"You should marry," she answered one day, when they were together in the great hall which he was decorating.

She was still dressed in black, and as she spoke, he turned and saw the outline of her small pure face against the high back of the old chair in which she was sitting. It was so white just then that he fancied he saw in it that fatal look which belonged to some of the Braccio family, and which was always spoken of as having been one of Maria Addolorata's chief characteristics. He looked at her long and sadly, leaning against an upright of his scaffolding as he stood on the floor near her, holding his brushes in his hand.

"I do not think I shall ever marry," he answered at last, looking down and idly mixing two colours on his palette.

"Why not?" she asked quickly. "I have heard you say that you might, some day."

"Some day, some day — and then, all at once, the 'some day' is past, and is not any more in the future. Why should I marry? I am well enough as I am; there would only be unhappiness."

"Do you think that every one who marries must be unhappy?" she asked. "You are cynical. I did not know it."

"No. I am not cynical. I say it only of myself. There are many reasons. I could not marry such a woman as I should wish to have for my wife.

You must surely understand that. It is very easy to understand."

He made as though he would go up the ladder to his little platform and continue his work. But she stopped him.

"What is the use of hurting your eyes?" she asked. "It is late, and the light is bad. Besides, I am not so sure that I understand what you mean, though you say that it is so easy. We have never talked about it much."

He laid his palette and brushes upon a ragged straw chair and sat down upon another, not far from her. There was no other furniture in the great vaulted hall, and the brick pavement was bare, and splashed in many places with white plaster. Fresco-painting can only be done upon stucco just laid on, while it is still moist, and a mason came early every day and prepared as much of the wall as Reanda could cover before night. If he did not paint over the whole surface, the remainder was chipped away and freshly laid over on the following morning.

The evening light already reddened the tall western windows, for it was autumn, and the days were shortening quickly. Reanda knew that he could not do much more, and sat down, to answer Francesca's question, if he could.

"I am not a gentleman, as you understand the word," he said slowly. "And yet I am certainly

not of the class to which my father belonged. My position is not defined. I could not marry a woman of your class, and I should not care to marry one of any other. That is all. Is it not clear?"

"Yes," answered Francesca. "It is clear enough. But —"

She checked herself, and he looked into her face, expecting her to continue. But she said nothing more.

"You were going to find an objection to what I said," he observed.

"No; I was not. I will say it, for you will understand me. What you tell me is true enough, and I am sorry that it should be so. Is it not to some extent my fault?"

"Your fault?" cried Reanda, leaning forward and looking into her eyes. "How? I do not understand."

"I blame myself," answered Francesca, quietly. "I have kept you out of the world, perhaps, and in many ways. Here you live, day after day, as though nothing else existed for you. In the morning, long before I am awake, you come down your staircase through that door, and go up that ladder, and work, and work, and work, all day long, until it is dark, as you have worked to-day, and yesterday, and for months. And when you might and should be out of doors, or associating with other people, as just now, I sit and talk to you and take up all

your leisure time. It is wrong. You ought to see more of other men and women. Do men of genius never marry? It seems to me absurd!"

"Genius!" exclaimed Reanda, shaking his head sadly. "Do not use the word of me."

"I will do as other people do," answered Francesca. "But that is not the question. The truth is that you live pent up in this old house, like a bird in a cage. I want you to spread your wings."

"To go away for a time?" asked Reanda, anxiously.

"I did not say that. Perhaps I should. Yes, if you could enjoy a journey, go away — for a time."

She spoke with some hesitation and rather nervously, for he had said more than she had meant to propose.

"Just to make a change," she added, after a moment's pause, as he said nothing. "You ought to see more of other people, as I said. You ought to mix with the world. You ought at least to offer yourself the chance of marrying, even if you think that you might not find a wife to your taste."

"If I do not find one here —" He did not complete the sentence, but smiled a little.

"Must you marry a Roman princess?" she asked. "What should you say to a foreigner? Is that impossible, too?"

"It would matter little where she came from, if I wished to marry her," he answered. "But I like my life as it is. Why should I try to change it? I am happy as I am. I work, and I enjoy working. I work for you, and you are satisfied. It seems to me that there is nothing more to be said. Why are you so anxious that I should marry?"

Donna Francesca laughed softly, but without much mirth.

"Because I think that in some way it is my fault if you have not married," she said. "And besides, I was thinking of a young girl whom I met, or rather, saw, the other day, and who might please you. She has the most beautiful voice in the world, I think. She could make her fortune as a singer, and I believe she wishes to try it. But her father objects. They are foreigners — English or Scotch — it is the same. She is a mere child, they say, but she seems to be quite grown up. There is something strange about them. He is a man of science, I am told, but I fancy he is one of those English enthusiasts about Italian liberty. His name is Dalrymple."

"What a name!" Reanda laughed. "I suppose they have come to spend the winter in Rome," he added.

"Not at all. I hear that they have lived here for years. But one never meets the foreigners,

unless they wish to be in society. His wife died young, they say, and this girl is his only daughter. I wish you could hear her sing!"

"For that matter, I wish I might," said Reanda, who was passionately fond of music.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SEVENTEEN years had scored their account on Angus Dalrymple's hard face, and one great sorrow had set an even deeper mark upon him — a sorrow so deep and so overwhelming that none had ever dared to speak of it to him. And he was not the man to bear any affliction resignedly, to feed on memory, and find rest in the dreams of what had been. Sullenly and fiercely rebellious against his fate, he went down life, rather than through it, savage and silent, for the most part, Nero-like in his wish that he could end the world at a single blow, himself and all that lived. Yet it was characteristic of the man that he had not chosen suicide as a means of escape, as he would have done in his earlier years, if Maria Addolorata had failed him. It seemed cowardly now, and he had never done anything cowardly in his life. Through his grief the sense of responsibility had remained with him, and had kept him alive. He looked upon his existence not as a state from which he had a right to escape, but as a personal enemy to be fought with, to be despised, to be ill-treated barbarously, perhaps, but still as an enemy to

murder whom in cold blood would be an act of cowardice.

There was little more than the mere sense of the responsibility, for he did little enough to fulfil his obligations. His wife had borne him a daughter, but it was not in Angus Dalrymple's nature to substitute one being in his heart for another. He could not love the girl simply because her mother was dead. He could only spoil her, with a rough idea that she should be spared all suffering as much as possible, but that if he gave her what she wanted, he had done all that could be expected of him. For the rest, he lived his own life.

He had a good intelligence and superior gifts, together with considerable powers of intellectual acquisition. He had believed in his youth that he was destined to make great discoveries, and his papers afterwards showed that he was really on the track of great and new things. But with his bereavement, all ambition as well as all curiosity disappeared in one day from his character. Since then he had never gone back to his studies, which disgusted him and seemed stale and flat. He grew rudely dogmatical when scientific matters were discussed before him, as he had become rough, tyrannical, and almost violent in his ordinary dealings with the world, whenever he found any opposition to his opinions or his will. The only exception he made was in his treatment of his daughter,

whom he indulged in every way except in her desire to be a public singer. It seemed to him that to give her everything she wanted was to fulfil all his obligations to her; in the one question of appearing on the stage he was inflexible. He simply refused to hear of it, rarely giving her any reasons beyond the ordinary ones which present themselves in such cases, and which were far from answering the impulse of the girl's genius.

They had called her Gloria in the days of their passionate happiness. The sentimental name had meant a great deal to them, for Dalrymple had at that time developed that sort of uncouth sentimentality which is in strong men like a fungus on an oak, and disgusts them afterwards unless they are able to forget it. The two had felt that the glory of life was in the child, and they had named her for it, as it were.

Years afterwards Dalrymple brought the little girl to Rome, drawn back irresistibly to the place by that physical association of impressions which moves such men strongly. They had remained, keeping from year to year a lodging Dalrymple had hired, at first hired for a few months. He never went to Subiaco.

He gave Gloria teachers, the best that could be found, and there were good instructors in those days when people were willing to take time in learning. In music she had her mother's voice

and talent. Her father gave her a musician's opportunities, and it was no wonder that she should dream of conquering Europe from behind the footlights as Grisi had done, and as Patti was just about to do in her turn.

She and her father spoke English together, but Gloria was bilingual, as children of mixed marriages often are, speaking English and Italian with equal ease. Dalrymple found a respectable middle-aged German governess who came daily and spent most of the day with Gloria, teaching her and walking with her — worshipping her, too, with that curious faculty for idealizing the very human, which belongs to German governesses when they like their pupils.

Dalrymple led his own life. Had he chosen to mix in Roman society, he would have been well received, as a member of a great Scotch family and not very far removed from the head of his house. No one of his relatives had ever known the truth about his wife except his father, who had died with the secret, and it was not likely that any one should ask questions. If any one did, he would certainly not satisfy such curiosity. But he cared little for society, and spent his time either alone with books and wine, or in occasional excursions into the artist world, where his eccentricities excited little remark, and where he met men who secretly sympathized with the Italian revolutionary

movement, and dabbled in conspiracies which rather amused than disquieted the papal government.

Though Gloria was at that time but little more than sixteen years of age, her father took her with him to little informal parties at the studios or even at the houses of artists, where there was often good music, and clever if not serious conversation. The conventionalities of age were little regarded in such circles. Gloria appeared, too, much older than she really was, and her marvellous voice made her a centre of attraction at an age when most young girls are altogether in the background. Dalrymple never objected to her singing on such occasions, and he invariably listened with closed eyes and folded hands, as though he were assisting at a religious service. Her voice was like her mother's, excepting that it was pitched higher, and had all the compass and power necessary for a great soprano. Dalrymple's almost devout attitude when Gloria was singing was the only allusion, if one may call it so, which he ever made to his dead wife's existence, and no one who watched him knew what it meant. But he was often more silent than usual after she had sung, and he sometimes went off by himself afterwards and sat for hours in one of the old wine cellars near the Capitol, drinking gloomily of the oldest and strongest he could find. For he drank more or less perpetually

in the evening, and wine made him melancholic and morose, though it did not seem to affect him otherwise. Little by little, however, it was dulling the early keenness of his intellect, though it hardly touched his constitution at all. He was lean and bony still, as in the old days, but paler in the face, and he had allowed his red beard to grow. It was streaked with grey, and there were small, nervous lines about his eyes, as well as deep furrows on his forehead and face.

Dalrymple had found in the artist world a man who was something of a companion to him at times, — a very young man, whom he could not understand, though his own dogmatic temper made him as a rule believe that he understood most things and most men. But this particular individual alternately puzzled, delighted, and irritated the nervous Scotchman.

They had made acquaintance at an artists' supper in the previous year, had afterwards met accidentally at the bookseller's in the Piazza di Spagna, where they both went from time to time to look at the English newspapers, and little by little they had fallen into the habit of meeting there of a morning, and of strolling in the direction of Dalrymple's lodging afterwards. At last Dalrymple had asked his companion to come in and look at a book, and so the acquaintance had grown. Gloria watched the young stranger, and at first she disliked him.

The aforesaid bookseller dealt, and deals still, in photographs and prints, as well as in foreign and Italian books. At the present time his establishment is distinctively a Roman Catholic one. In those days it was almost the only one of its kind, and was patronized alike by Romans and foreigners. Even Donna Francesca Campodonico went there from time to time for a book on art or an engraving which she and Reanda needed for their work. They occasionally walked all the way from the Palazzetto Borgia to the Piazza di Spagna together in the morning. When they had found what they wanted, Donna Francesca generally drove home in a cab, and Reanda went to his midday meal before returning. For the line of his intimacy with her was drawn at this point. He had never sat down at the same table with her, and he never expected to do so. As the two stood to one another at present, though Francesca would willingly have asked him to breakfast, she would have hesitated to do so, merely because the first invitation would inevitably call attention to the fact that the line had been drawn somewhere, whereas both were willing to believe that it had never existed at all. Under any pressure of necessity she would have driven with him in a cab, but not in her own carriage. They both knew it, and by tacit consent never allowed such unknown possibilities to suggest themselves. But in the mornings,

there was nothing to prevent their walking together as far as the Piazza di Spagna, or anywhere else.

They went to the bookseller's one day soon after the conversation which had led Francesca to mention the Dalrymples. As they walked along the east side of the great square, they saw two men before them.

"There goes the Gladiator," said Reanda to his companion, suddenly. "There is no mistaking his walk, even at this distance."

"What do you mean?" asked Francesca. "Unless I am mistaken, the man who is a little the taller, the one in the rough English clothes, is Mr. Dalrymple. I spoke of him the other day, you know."

"Oh! Is that he? The other has a still more extraordinary name. He is Paul Griggs. He is the son of an American consul who died in Civita Vecchia twenty years ago, and left him a sort of waif, for he had no money and apparently no relatives. Somehow he has grown up, Heaven knows how, and gets a living by journalism. I believe he was at sea for some years as a boy. He is really as much Italian as American. I have met him with artists and literary people."

"Why do you call him the Gladiator?" asked Francesca, with some interest.

"It is a nickname he has got. Cotogni, the sculptor, was in despair for a model last year.

Griggs and two or three other men were in the studio, and somebody suggested that Griggs was very near the standard of the ancients in his proportions. They persuaded him to let them measure him. You know that in the 'Canons' of proportion, the Borghese Gladiator — the one in the Louvre — is given as the best example of an athlete. They measured Griggs then and there, and found that he was at all points the exact living image of the statue. The name has stuck to him. You see what a fellow he is, and how he walks."

"Yes, he looks strong," said Francesca, watching the man with natural curiosity.

The young American was a little shorter than Dalrymple, but evidently better proportioned. No one could fail to notice the vast breadth of shoulder, the firm, columnar throat, and the small athlete's head with close-set ears. He moved without any of that swinging motion of the upper part of the body which is natural to many strong men and was noticeable in Dalrymple, but there was something peculiar in his walk, almost undefinable, but conveying the idea of very great strength with very great elasticity.

"But he is an ugly man," observed Reanda, almost immediately. "Ugly, but not repulsive. You will see, if he turns his head. His face is like a mask. It is not the face you would expect with such a body."

"How curious!" exclaimed Francesca, rather idly, for her interest in Paul Griggs was almost exhausted.

They went on along the crowded pavement. When they reached the bookseller's and went in, they saw that the two men were there before them, looking over the foreign papers, which were neatly arranged on a little table apart. Dalrymple looked up and recognized Francesca, to whom he had been introduced at a small concert given for a charity in a private house, on which occasion Gloria had sung. He lifted his hat from his head and laid it down upon the newspapers, when Francesca rather unexpectedly held out her hand to him in English fashion. He had left a card at her house on the day after their meeting, but as she was alone in the world, she had no means of returning the civility.

"It would give me great pleasure if you would bring your daughter to see me," she said graciously.

"You are very kind," answered Dalrymple, his steely blue eyes scrutinizing her pure young features.

She only glanced at him, for she was suddenly conscious that his companion was looking at her. He, too, had laid down his hat, and she instantly understood what Reanda had meant by comparing his face to a mask. The features were certainly very far from handsome. If they were redeemed at all, it was by the very deep-set eyes, which gazed

into hers in a strangely steady way, as though the lids never could droop from under the heavy overhanging brow, and then, still unwinking, turned in another direction. The man's complexion was of that perfectly even but almost sallow colour which often belongs to very strong melancholic temperaments. His face was clean-shaven and unnaturally square and expressionless, excepting for such life as there was in the deep eyes. Dark, straight, closely cut hair grew thick and smooth as a priest's skull-cap, low on the forehead and far forward at the temples. The level mouth, firmly closed, divided the lower part of the face like the scar of a straight sabre-cut. The nose was very thick between the eyes, relatively long, with unusually broad nostrils which ran upward from the point to the lean cheeks. The man wore very dark clothes of extreme simplicity, and at a time when pins and chains were much in fashion, he had not anything visible about him of gold or silver. He wore his watch on a short, doubled piece of black silk braid slipped through his buttonhole. He dressed almost as though he were in mourning.

Francesca unconsciously looked at him so intently for a moment that Dalrymple thought it natural to introduce him, fancying that she might have heard of him and might wish to know him out of curiosity.

"May I introduce Mr. Griggs?" he said, with the stiff inclination which was a part of his manner.

Griggs bowed, and Donna Francesca bent her head a little. Reanda came up and shook hands with the American, and Francesca introduced the artist to Dalrymple.

"I have long wished to have the pleasure of knowing you, Signor Reanda," said the latter. "We have many mutual acquaintances among the artists here. I may say that I am a great admirer of your work, and my daughter, too, for that matter."

Reanda said something civil as his hand parted from the Scotchman's. Francesca saw an opportunity of bringing Reanda and Gloria together.

"As you like Signor Reanda's painting so much," she said to Dalrymple, "will you not bring your daughter this afternoon to see the frescoes he is doing in my house? You know the Palazzetto? Of course — you left a card, but I had no one to return it," she added rather sadly. "Will you also come, Mr. Griggs?" she asked, turning to the American. "It will give me much pleasure, and I see you know Signor Reanda. This afternoon, if you like, at any time after four o'clock."

Both Dalrymple and Griggs secretly wondered a little at receiving such an invitation from a Roman lady whom the one had met but once before,

and to whom the other had but just been introduced. But they bowed their thanks, and promised to come.

After a few more words they separated, Francesca and Reanda to pick out the engraving they wanted, and the other two men to return to their newspapers. By and bye Francesca passed them again, on her way out.

"I shall expect you after four o'clock," she said, nodding graciously as she went by.

Dalrymple looked after her, till she had left the shop.

"That woman is not like other women, I think," he said thoughtfully, to his companion.

The mask-like face turned itself deliberately towards him, with shadowy, unwinking eyes.

"No," answered Griggs, and he slowly took up his paper again.

CHAPTER XIX.

Donna Francesca received her three guests in the drawing-room, on the side of the house which she inhabited. Reanda was at his work in the great hall.

Gloria entered first, followed closely by her father, and Francesca was dazzled by the young girl's brilliancy of colour and expression, though she had seen her once before. As she came in, the afternoon sun streamed upon her face and turned her auburn hair to red gold, and gleamed upon her small white teeth as her strong lips parted to speak the first words. She was tall and supple, graceful as a panther, and her voice rang and whispered and rang again in quick changes of tone, like a waterfall in the woods in summer. With much of her mother's beauty, she had inherited from her father the violent vitality of his youth. Yet she was not noisy, though her manners were not like Francesca's. Her voice rippled and rang, but she did not speak too loud. She moved swiftly and surely, but not with rude haste. Nevertheless, it seemed to Francesca that there must be some exaggeration somewhere. The elder woman at

first set it down as a remnant of schoolgirl shyness, and then at once felt that she was mistaken, because there was not the smallest awkwardness nor lack of self-possession about it. The contrast between the young girl and Paul Griggs was so striking as to be almost violent. He was cold and funereal in his leonine strength, and his face was more like a mask than ever as he bowed and sat down in silence. When he did not remind her of a gladiator, he made her think of a black lion with a strange, human face, and eyes that were not exactly human, though they did not remind her of any animal's eyes which she had ever seen.

As for Dalrymple, she thought that he was singularly haggard and worn for a man apparently only in middle age. There was a certain imposing air about him, which she liked. Besides, she rarely met foreigners, and they interested her. She noticed that both men wore black coats and carried their tall hats in their hands. They were therefore not artists, nor to be classed with artists. She was still young enough to judge them to some extent by details, to which people attached a good deal more importance at that time than at present. She made up her mind in the course of the next few minutes that both Dalrymple and Griggs belonged to her own class, though she did not ask herself where the young American had got his manners. But somehow, though Gloria fascinated

her eyes and her ears, she set down the girl as being inferior to her father. She wondered whether Gloria's mother had not been an actress; which was a curious reflexion, considering that the dead woman had been of her own house and name.

After exchanging a few words with her guests, Francesca suggested that they should cross to the other side and see the frescoes, adding that Reanda was probably still at work.

"You know him, Mr. Griggs?" she said, as they all rose to leave the room.

"Yes," he answered, "as one man knows another."

"What does that mean?" asked Francesca, moving towards the door to lead the way.

"It does not mean much," replied the young man, with curious ambiguity.

He was very gentle in his manner, and spoke in a low voice and rather diffidently. She looked at him as though mentally determining to renew the question at some other time. Her first impression was that of a sort of duality about the man, as she found the possibility of a double meaning in his answer. His magnificent frame seemed to belong to one person, his voice and manner to another. Both might be good in their way, but her curiosity was excited by the side which was the less apparent.

They all went through the house till they came to a door which divided the inhabited part from the

hall in which Reanda was working. She knocked gently upon it with her knuckles, and then smiled as she saw Gloria looking at her.

"We keep it locked," she said. "The masons come in the morning to lay on the stucco. One never trusts those people. Signor Reanda keeps the key of this door."

The artist opened from within, and stood aside to let the party pass. He started perceptibly when he first saw Gloria. As a boy he had seen Maria Braccio more than once before she had entered the convent, and he was struck by the girl's strong resemblance to her. Francesca, following Gloria, saw his movement of surprise, and attributed it merely to admiration or astonishment such as she had felt herself a quarter of an hour earlier. She smiled a little as she went by, and Reanda knew that the smile was for him because he had shown surprise. He understood the misinterpretation, and resented it a little.

But she knew Reanda well, and before ten minutes had passed she had convinced herself that he was repelled rather than attracted by the young girl, in spite of the latter's undisguised admiration of his work. It was not mere unintelligent enthusiasm, either, and he might well have been pleased and flattered by her unaffected praise.

She was interested, too, in the technical mechanics of fresco-painting, which she had never before

been able to see at close quarters. Everything interested Gloria, and especially everything connected with art. As soon as they had all spoken their first words of compliment and appreciation, she entered into conversation with the painter, asking him all sorts of questions, and listening earnestly to what he said, until he realized that she was certainly not assuming an appearance of admiration for the sake of flattering him.

Meanwhile Francesca talked with Griggs, and Dalrymple, having gone slowly round the hall alone after all the others, came and stood beside the two and watched Francesca, occasionally offering a rather dry remark in a somewhat absent-minded way. It was all rather commonplace and decidedly quiet, and he was not much amused, though from time to time he seemed to become absorbed in studying Francesca's face, as though he saw something there which was past his comprehension. She noticed that he watched her, and felt a little uncomfortable under his steely blue eyes, so that she turned her head and talked more with Griggs than with him. Remembering what Reanda had told her of the young man's origin, she did not like to ask him the common questions about residence in Rome and his liking for Italy. She was self-possessed and ready enough at conversation, and she chose to talk of general subjects. They talked in Italian, of course. Dal-

rymple, as of old, spoke fluently, but with a strange accent. Any one would have taken Paul Griggs for a Roman. At last, almost in spite of herself, she made a remark about his speech.

"I was born here," answered Griggs. "It is much more remarkable that Miss Dalrymple should speak Italian as she does, having been born in Scotland."

"Are you talking about me?" asked the young girl, turning her head quickly, though she was standing with Reanda at some distance from the others.

"I was speaking of your accent in Italian," said Griggs.

"Is there anything wrong about it?" asked Gloria, with an anxiety that seemed exaggerated.

"On the contrary," answered Donna Francesca, "Mr. Griggs was telling me how perfectly you speak. But I had noticed it."

"Oh! I thought Mr. Griggs was finding fault," answered Gloria, turning to Reanda again.

Dalrymple looked at his daughter as though he were annoyed. The eyes of Francesca and Griggs met for a moment. All three were aware that they resented the young girl's quick question as one which they themselves would not have asked in her place, had they accidentally heard their names mentioned in a distant conversation. But Francesca instantly went on with the subject.

"To us Italians," she said, "it seems incredible that any one should speak our language and English equally well. It is as though you were two persons, Mr. Griggs," she added, smiling at the covered expression of her thought about him.

"I sometimes think so myself," answered Griggs, with one of his steady looks. "In a way, every one must have a sort of duality — a good and evil principle."

"God and the devil," suggested Francesca, simply.

"Body and soul would do, I suppose. The one is always in slavery to the other. The result is a sinner or a saint, as the case may be. One never can tell," he added more carelessly. "I am not sure that it matters. But one can see it. The battle is fought in the face."

"I do not understand. What battle?"

"The battle between body and soul. The face tells which way the fight is going."

She looked at his own, and she felt that she could not tell. But to a certain extent she understood him.

"Griggs is full of theories," observed Dalrymple. "Gloria, come down!" he cried in English, suddenly.

Gloria, intent upon understanding how fresco-painting was done, was boldly mounting the steps of the ladder towards the top of the little scaffold-

ing, which might have been fourteen feet high. For the vault had long been finished, and Reanda was painting the walls.

"Nonsense, papa!" answered the young girl, also in English. "There's no danger at all."

"Well — don't break your neck," said Dalrymple. "I wish you would come down, though."

Francesca was surprised at his indifference, and at his daughter's calm disregard of his authority. Timid, too, as most Italian women of higher rank, she watched the girl nervously. Griggs raised his eyes without lifting his head.

"Gloria is rather wild," said Dalrymple, in a sort of apology. "I hope you will forgive her — she is so much interested."

"Oh — if she wishes to see, let her go, of course," answered Francesca, concealing a little nervous irritation she felt.

A moment later Gloria and Reanda were on the small platform, on one side of which only there was a hand rail. It had been made for him, and his head was steady even at a much greater elevation. He was pointing out to her the way in which the colours slowly changed as the stucco dried from day to day, and explaining how it was impossible to see the effect of what was done until all was completely dry. The others continued to talk below, but Griggs glanced up from time to time, and Francesca's eyes followed his. Dalrymple

had become indifferent, allowing his daughter to do what she pleased, as usual.

When Gloria had seen all she wished to see, she turned with a quick movement to come down again, and on turning, she found herself much nearer to the edge than she had expected. She was bending forwards a little, and Griggs saw at once that she must lose her balance, unless Reanda caught her from behind. But she made no sound, and turned very white as she swayed a little, trying to throw herself back.

With a swift movement that was gentle but irresistible, Griggs pushed Francesca back, keeping his eyes on the girl above. It all happened in an instant.

"Jump!" he cried, in a voice of command.

She had felt that she must spring or fall, and her body was already overbalanced as she threw herself off, instinctively gathering her skirt with her hands. Dalrymple turned as pale as she. If she struck the bare brick floor, she could scarcely escape serious injury. But she did not reach it, for Paul Griggs caught her in his arms, swayed with her weight, then stood as steady as a rock, and set her gently upon her feet, beside her father.

"Maria Santissima!" cried Francesca, terrified, though instantly relieved, and dimly understanding the stupendous feat of bodily strength which had just been done before her eyes.

Above, Reanda leaned upon the single rail of the scaffolding with wide-staring eyes. Gloria was faint with the shock of fear, and grasped her father's arm.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" he said roughly, in English, but in a low voice. "You probably owe your life to Mr. Griggs," he added, immediately regaining his self-possession.

Griggs alone seemed wholly unmoved by what had happened. Gloria had held one of her gloves loosely in her hand, and it had fallen to the ground as she sprang. He picked it up and handed it to her with a curious gentleness.

"It must be yours, Miss Dalrymple," he said.

CHAPTER XX.

It was late before Reanda and Donna Francesca were alone together on that afternoon. When the first surprise and shock of Gloria's accident had passed, Francesca would not allow Dalrymple to take her away at once, as he seemed anxious to do. The girl was not in the least hurt, but she was still dazed and frightened. Francesca took them all back to the drawing-room and insisted upon giving them tea, because they were foreigners, and Gloria, she said, must naturally need something to restore her nerves. Roman tea, thirty years ago, was a strange and uncertain beverage, as both Gloria and her father knew, but they drank what Francesca gave them, and at last went away with many apologies for the disturbance they had made. To tell the truth, Francesca was glad when they were gone and she was at liberty to return to the hall where Reanda was still at work. She found him nervous and irritated. He came down from the scaffolding as soon as he heard her open the door. Neither spoke until she had seated herself in her accustomed chair, with a very frank sigh of relief.

"I am very grateful to you, Donna Francesca," said Reanda, twisting his beard round his long, thin fingers, as he glanced at her and then surveyed his work.

"It was your fault," she answered, tapping the worm-eaten arms of the old chair with both her white hands, for she herself was still annoyed and irritated. "Do not make me responsible for the girl's folly."

"Responsibility! May that never be!" exclaimed the artist, in the common Italian phrase, but with a little irony. "But as for the responsibility, I do not know whose it was. It was certainly not I who invited the young lady to go up the ladder."

"Well, it was her fault. Besides, the absent are always wrong. But she is handsome, is she not?"

Reanda shrugged his thin shoulders, and looked critically at his hands, which were smeared with paint.

"Very handsome," he said indifferently. "But it is a beauty that says nothing to me. One must be young to like that kind of beauty. She is a beautiful storm, that young lady. For one who seeks peace —" He shrugged his shoulders again. "And then, her manners! I do not understand English, but I know that her father was telling her to come down, and yet she went up. I do not

know what education these foreigners have. Instruction, yes, as much as you please; but education, no. They have no more than barbarians. The father says, 'You must not do that.' And the daughter does it. What education is that? Of course, if they were friends of yours, I should not say it."

"Nevertheless that girl is very handsome," insisted Francesca. "She has the Venetian colouring. Titian would have painted her just as she is, without changing anything."

"Beauty, beauty!" exclaimed Reanda, impatiently. "Of course, it is beauty! Food for the brush, that says nothing to the heart. The devil can also take the shape of a beautiful woman. That is it. There is something in that young lady's face — how shall I say? It pleases me — little! You must forgive me, princess. My nerves are shaken. Divine goodness! To see a young girl flying through the air like Simon Magus! It was enough!"

Francesca laughed gently. Reanda shook his head with slow disapprobation, and frowned.

"I say the truth," he said. "There is something — I cannot explain. But I can show you," he added quickly.

He took up his palette and brushes from the chair on which they lay, and reached the white plastered wall in two steps.

"Paint her," said Francesca, to encourage him.

"Yes, I will show her to you — as I think she is," he answered.

He closed his eyes for a moment, calling up the image before him, then went back to the chair and took a quantity of colour from a tube which lay, with half-a-dozen others, in the hollow of the rush seat. They were not the colours he used for fresco-painting, but had been left there when he had made a sketch of a head two or three days previously. In a moment he was before the wall again. It was roughly plastered from the floor to the lower line of the frescoes. With a long, coarse brush he began to sketch a gigantic head of a woman. The oil paint lay well on the rough, dry surface. He worked in great strokes at the full length of his arm.

"Make her beautiful, at least," said Francesca, watching him.

"Oh, yes — very beautiful," he answered.

He worked rapidly for a few minutes, smiling, as his hand moved, but not pleasantly. Francesca thought there was an evil look in his face which she had never seen there before, and that his smile was wicked and spiteful.

"But you are painting a sunset!" she cried suddenly.

"A sunset? That is her hair. It is red, and she has much of it. Wait a little."

And he went on. It was certainly something like a sunset, the bright, waving streamers of the clouds flying far to right and left, and blending away to the neutral tint of the dry plaster as though to a grey sky.

"Yes, but it is still a sunset," said Francesca. "I have seen it like that from the Campagna in winter."

"She is not 'Gloria' for nothing," answered Reanda. "I am making her glorious. You shall see."

Suddenly, with another tone, he brought out the main features of the striking face, by throwing in strong shadows from the flaming hair. Francesca became more interested. The head was colossal, extraordinary, almost unearthly; the expression was strange.

"What a monster!" exclaimed Francesca at last, as he stood aside, still touching the enormous sketch here and there with his long brush, at arm's length. "It is terrible," she added, in a lower tone.

"Truth is always terrible," answered Reanda. "But you cannot say that it is not like her."

"Horribly like. It is diabolical!"

"And yet it is a beautiful head," said the artist. "Perhaps you are too near." He himself crossed the hall, and then turned round to look at his work. "It is better from here," he said. "Will you come?"

She went to his side. The huge face and wildly streaming hair stood out as though in three dimensions from the wall. The great, strong mouth smiled at her with a smile that was at once evil and sad and fatal. The strange eyes looked her through and through from beneath the vast brow.

"It is diabolical, satanical!" she responded, under her breath.

Reanda still smiled wickedly and watched her. The face seemed to grow and grow till it filled the whole range of vision. The dark eyes flashed; the lips trembled; the flaming hair quivered and waved and curled up like snakes that darted hither and thither. Yet it was horribly like Gloria, and the fresh, rich oil colours gave it her startling and vivid brilliancy.

It was the sudden and enormous expression of a man of genius, strung and stung, till irritation had to find its explosion through the one art of which he was absolute master — in a fearful caricature exaggerating beauty itself to the bounds of the devilish.

"I cannot bear it!" cried Francesca.

She snatched the big brush from his hand, and, running lightly across the room, dashed the colour left in it across the face in all directions, over the eyes and the mouth, and through the long red hair. In ten seconds nothing remained but confused daubs and splashes of brilliant paint.

"There!" cried Francesca. "And I wish I had never seen it!"

Still holding the brush in her hand, she turned her back to the obliterated sketch and faced Reanda, with a look of girlish defiance and satisfaction. His face was grave now, but he seemed pleased with what he had done.

"It makes no difference," he said. "You will never forget it."

He felt that he was revenged for the smile she had bestowed upon his apparent surprise at Gloria's beauty, when she had followed the girl into the hall, and had seen him start. He could not conceal his triumph.

"That is the young lady whom you thought I might wish to marry," he said. "You know me little after so many years, Donna Francesca. You have bestowed much kindness upon a man whom you do not know."

"My dear Reanda, who can understand you? But as for kindness, do not let me hear the word between you and me. It has no meaning. We are always good friends, as we were when I was a little girl and used to play with your paints. You have given me far more than I can ever repay you for, in your works. I do not flatter you, my friend. Cupid and Psyche, there in your frescoes, will outlive me and be famous when I am forgotten — yet they are mine, are they not? And you gave them to me."

The sweet young face turned to him with an unaffected, grateful smile. His sad features softened all at once.

"Ah, Donna Francesca," he said gently, "you have given me something better than Cupid and Psyche, for your gift will live forever in heaven."

She looked thoughtfully into his eyes, but with a sort of question in her own.

"Your dear friendship," he added, bending his head a little. Then he laughed suddenly. "Do not give me a wife," he concluded.

"And you, Reanda — do not make wicked caricatures of women you have only seen once! Besides, I go back to it again. I saw you start when she passed you at the door. You were surprised at her beauty. You must admit that. And then, because you are irritated with her, you take a brush and daub that monstrous thing upon the wall! It is a shame!"

"I started, yes. It was not because she struck me as beautiful. It was something much more strange. Do you know? She is the very portrait of Donna Maria, who was in the Carmelite convent at Subiaco, and who was burned to death. I have often told you that I remembered having seen her when I was a boy, both at Gerano and at the Palazzo Braccio, before she took the veil. There is a little difference in the colouring, I think, and much in the expression. But the rest — it is the image!"

Francesca, who could not remember her ill-fated kinswoman, was not much impressed by Reanda's statement.

"It makes your caricature all the worse," she answered, "since it was also a caricature of that holy woman. As for the resemblance, after all these years, it is a mere impression. Who knows? It may be. There is no portrait of Sister Maria Addolorata."

"Oh, but I remember well!" insisted Reanda.

"Well, it concludes nothing, after all," returned Francesca, with much logic. "It does not make a fiend of the poor nun, who is an angel by this time, and it does not make Miss Dalrymple less beautiful. And now, Signor Painter," she added, with another girlish laugh, "if we have quarrelled enough to restore your nerves, I am going out. It is almost dark, and I have to go to the Austrian Embassy before dinner, and the carriage has been waiting for an hour."

"You, princess!" exclaimed Reanda, in surprise; for she had not begun to go into the world yet since her husband's death.

"It is not a reception. We are to meet there about arranging another of those charity concerts for the deaf and dumb."

"I might have known," answered the painter. "As for me, I shall go to the theatre to-night. There is the Trovatore."

"That is a new thing for you, too. But I am glad. Amuse yourself, and tell me about the singing to-morrow. Remember to lock the door and take the key. I do not trust the masons in the morning."

"Do I ever forget?" asked Reanda. "But I will lock it now, as you go out; for it is late, and I shall go upstairs."

"Good night," said Francesca, as she turned to leave the room.

"And you forgive the caricature?" asked Reanda, holding the door open for her to pass.

"I would forgive you many things," she answered, smiling as she went by.

CHAPTER XXI.

In those days the Trovatore was not an old-fashioned opera. It was not 'threshed-out,' to borrow the vigorous German phrase. Wagner had not eclipsed melody with 'tone-poetry,' nor made men feel more than they could hear. Many of the great things of this century-ending had not been done then, nor even dreamed of, and even musicians listened to the Trovatore with pleasure, not dreaming of the untried strength that lay waiting in Verdi's vast reserve. It was then the music of youth. To us it seems but the music of childhood. Many of us cannot listen to Manrico's death-song from the tower without hearing the grind-organ upon which its passion has grown so pathetically poor. But one could understand that music. The mere statement that it was comprehensible raises a smile to-day. It appealed to simple feelings. We are no longer satisfied with such simplicity, and even long for powers that do not appeal, but twist us with something stronger than our hardened selves, until we ourselves appeal to the unknown, in a sort of despairing ecstasy of unsatisfied delight, asking of possibility to stretch itself out to the impossible. We are in a strange

phase of development. We see the elaborately artificial world-scape painted by Science on the curtain close before our eyes, but our restless hands are thrust through it and beyond, opening eagerly and shutting on nothing, though we know that something is there.

Angelo Reanda was passionately fond of what was called music in Italy more than thirty years ago. He had the true ear and the facile memory for melody common to Italians, who are a singing people, if not a musical race, and which constituted a talent for music when music was considered to be a succession of sounds rather than a series of sensuous impressions. He could listen to an opera, understand it without thought, enjoy it simply, and remember it without difficulty, like thousands of other Romans. Most of us would willingly go back to such childlike amusements if we could. A few possess the power even now, and are looked upon with friendly contempt by their more cultured, and therefore more tortured, musical acquaintances, whose dream it is to be torn to very rags in the delirium of orchestral passion.

Reanda went to the Apollo Theatre in search of merely pleasurable sensations, and he got exactly what he wanted. The old house was brilliant even in those days, less with light than with jewels, it is true, but perhaps that illumination was as good as any other. The Roman ladies and the ladies

of the great embassies used then to sit through the whole evening in their boxes, and it was the privilege, as it is still in Rome, of the men in the stalls and pit to stand up between the acts and admire them and their diamonds as much as they pleased. The light was dim enough, compared with what we have nowadays; for gas was but just introduced in a few of the principal streets, and the lamps in the huge chandelier at the Apollo, and in the brackets around the house, were filled with the olive oil which to-day dresses the world's salad. But it was a soft warm light, with rich yellow in it, which penetrated the shadows and beautified all it touched.

Reanda, like the others, stood up and looked about him after the first act. His eyes were instantly arrested by Gloria's splendid hair, which caught the light from above. She was seated in the front of a box on the third tier, the second row of boxes being almost exclusively reserved in those days. Dalrymple was beside his daughter, and the dark, still face of Paul Griggs was just visible in the shadow.

Gloria saw the artist almost immediately, for he could not help looking at her curiously, comparing her face with the mad sketch he had made on the wall. She nodded to him, and then spoke to her father, evidently calling his attention to Reanda, for Dalrymple looked down at once, and also

nodded, while Griggs leaned forward a little and stared vacantly into the pit.

"It is an obsession to-day," said Reanda to himself, reflecting that though the girl lived in Rome he had never noticed her before, and had now seen her twice on the same day.

He mentally added the reflexion that she must have good nerves, and that most young girls would be at home with a headache after such a narrow escape as hers. She was quite as handsome as he had thought, however, and even more so, now that he saw her in her girlish evening gown, which was just a little open at the throat, and without even the simplest of ornaments. The white material and the shadow around and behind her threw her head into strong relief.

The curtain went up again, and Reanda sat down and watched the performance and listened to the simple, stirring melodies. But he was uncomfortably conscious that Gloria was looking at the back of his head from her box. Nervous people know the unpleasant sensation which such a delusion can produce. Reanda moved uneasily in his seat, and looked round more than once, just far enough to catch sight of Gloria's hair without looking up into her eyes.

His thoughts were disturbed, and he recalled vividly the face of the dead nun, which he had seen long ago. The resemblance was certainly

strong. Maria Addolorata had sometimes had a strange expression which was quite her own, and which he had not yet seen in Gloria. But he felt that he should see it some day. He was sure of it, so sure that he had thrown its full force into the sketch on the wall, knowing that it would startle Donna Francesca. It was not possible that two women should be so much alike and yet that one of them should never have that look. Perhaps Gloria had it now and was staring at the back of his head.

An unaccountable nervousness took possession of the sensitive man, and he suffered as he sat there. After the curtain dropped he rose and left the theatre without looking up, and crossed the narrow street to a little coffee shop familiar to him for many years. He drank a cup of coffee, broke off the end of a thin black Roman cigar, and smoked for a few minutes before he returned.

Gloria had not moved, but Griggs was either gone or had retired further back into the shadow. Dalrymple was leaning back in his chair, bony and haggard, one of his great hands hanging listlessly over the front of the box. Reanda sat down again, and determined that he would not turn round before the end of the act. But it was of no use. He irritated his neighbours on each side by his restlessness, and his forehead was moist as though he

were suffering great pain. Again he faced about and stared upwards at the box. Gloria, to his surprise, was not looking at him, but in the shadow he met the inscrutable eyes of Paul Griggs, fixed upon him as though they would never look away. But he cared very little whether Griggs looked at him or not. He faced the stage again and was more quiet.

It was a good performance, and he began to be glad that he had come. The singers were young, the audience was inclined to applaud, and everything went smoothly. Reanda thought the soprano rather weak in the great tower scene.

"Calpesta il mio cadavere, ma salva il Trovator!"

she sang in great ascending intervals.

Reanda sighed, for she made no impression on him, and he remembered that he had been deeply impressed, even thrilled, when he had first heard the phrase. He had realized the situation then and had felt with Leonora. Perhaps he had grown too old to feel that sort of young emotion any more. He sighed regretfully as he rose from his seat. Looking up once more, he saw that Gloria was putting on her cloak, her back turned to the theatre. He waited a moment and then moved on with the crowd, to get his coat from the cloak-room.

He went out and walked slowly up the Via di

Tordinona. It was a dark and narrow street in those days. The great old-fashioned lanterns were swung up with their oil lamps in them, by long levers held in place by chains locked to the wall. Here and there over a low door a red light showed that wine was sold in a basement which was almost a cellar. The crowd from the theatre hurried along close by the walls, in constant danger from the big coaches that dashed past, bringing the Roman ladies home, for all had to pass through that narrow street. Landaus were not yet invented, and the heavy carriages rumbled loudly through the darkness, over the small paving-stones. But the people on foot were used to them, and stood pressed against the walls as they went by, or grouped for a moment on the low doorsteps of the dark houses.

Reanda went with the rest. He might have gone the other way, by the Banchi Vecchi, from the bridge of Sant' Angelo, and it would have been nearer, but he had a curious fancy that the Dalrymples might walk home, and that he might see Gloria again. Though it was not yet winter, the night was bright and cold, and it was pleasant to walk. The regular season at the Apollo Theatre did not begin until Christmas, but there were often good companies there at other times of the year.

The artist walked on, glancing at the groups he passed in the dim street, but neither pausing nor

hurrying. He meant to let fate have her own way with him that night.

Fate was not far off. He had gone on some distance, and the crowd had dispersed in various directions, till he was almost alone as he emerged into the open space where the Via del Clementino intersects the Ripetta. At that moment he heard a wild and thrilling burst of song.

"Calpesta il mio cadavere, ma salva il Trovator!"

The great soprano rang out upon the midnight silence, like the voice of a despairing archangel, and there was nothing more.

"Hush!" exclaimed a man's voice energetically.

Two or three windows were opened high up, for no one had ever heard such a woman's voice in the streets before. Reanda peered before him through the gloom, saw three people standing at the next corner, and hastened his long steps. An instinct he could not explain told him that Gloria had sung the short strain, which had left him cold and indifferent when he had heard it in the theatre. He was neither now, and he was possessed by the desire to be sure that it had been she.

He was not mistaken. Griggs had recognized him first, and they had waited for him at the corner.

"It is an unexpected pleasure to meet twice in the same day," said Reanda.

"The pleasure is ours," answered Dalrymple, in the correct phrase, but with his peculiar accent. "I suppose you heard my daughter's screams," he added drily. "She was explaining to us how a particular phrase should be sung."

"Was I not right?" asked Gloria, quickly appealing to Reanda with the certainty of support.

"A thousand times right," he answered. "How could one be wrong with such a voice?"

Gloria was pleased, and they all walked on together till they reached the door of Dalrymple's lodging.

"Come in and have supper with us," said the Scotchman, who seemed to be less gloomy than usual. "I suppose you live in our neighbourhood?"

"No. In the Palazzetto Borgia, where I work."

"This is not exactly on your way home, then," observed Gloria. "You may as well rest and refresh yourself."

Reanda accepted the invitation, wondering inwardly at the assurance of the foreign girl. With her Italian speech she should have had Italian manners, he thought. The three men all carried tapers, as was then customary, and they all lit them before they ascended the dark staircase.

"This is an illumination," said Dalrymple, looking back as he led the way.

Gloria stopped suddenly, and looked round. She was following her father, and Reanda came after her, Griggs being the last.

"One, two, three," she counted, and her eyes met Reanda's.

Without the slightest hesitation, she blew out the taper he held in his hand. But, for one instant, he had seen in her face the expression of the dead nun, distinct in the clear light, and close to his eyes.

"Why did you do that?" asked Dalrymple, who had turned his head again, as the taper was extinguished.

"Three *l*ights mean death," said Gloria, promptly; and she laughed, as she went quickly up the steps.

"It is true," answered Reanda, in a low voice, as he followed her; and it occurred to him that in a flash he had seen death written in the brilliant young face.

Ten minutes later, they were seated around the table in the Dalrymples' small dining-room. Reanda noticed that everything he saw there evidently belonged to the hired lodging, from the old-fashioned Italian silver forks, battered and crooked at the prongs, to the heavy cut-glass decanters, stained with age and use, at the neck, and between the diamond-shaped cuttings. There was supper enough for half-a-dozen people, however, and an extraordinary quantity of wine. Dalrymple swallowed a big tumbler of it before he ate anything. Paul Griggs filled his glass to

the brim, and looked at it. He had hardly spoken since Reanda had joined the party.

The artist made an effort to be agreeable, feeling that the invitation had been a very friendly one, considering the slight acquaintance he had with the Dalrymples, an acquaintance not yet twenty-four hours old. Presently he asked Gloria if she had felt no ill effects from her extraordinary accident in the afternoon.

"I had not thought about it again," she answered. "I have thought of nothing but your painting all the evening, until that woman sang that phrase as though she were asking the Conte di Luna for more strawberries and cream."

She laughed, but her eyes were fixed on his face.

"'Un altro po' di fravole, e dammi crema ancor,'"

she sang softly, in the Roman dialect.

Then she laughed again, and Reanda smiled at the absurd words — "A few more strawberries, and give me some more cream." But even the few notes, a lazy parody of the prima donna's singing of the phrase, charmed his simple love of melody.

"Don't look so grim, papa," she said in English. "Nobody can hear me here, you know."

"I should not think anybody would wish to," answered the Scotchman; but he spoke in Italian, in consideration of his guest, who did not understand English.

"I do not know why you are always so angry if I sing anything foolish," said the young girl, going back to Italian. "One cannot be always serious. But I was talking about your frescoes, Signor Reanda. I have thought of nothing else."

Again her eyes met the artist's, but fell before his. He was too great a painter not to know the value of such flattering speeches in general, and in a way he was inclined to resent the girl's boldness. But at the same time, it was hard to believe that she was not really in earnest, for she had that power of sudden gravity which lends great weight to little speeches. In spite of himself, and perhaps rightly, he believed her. Paul Griggs did not, and he watched her curiously.

"Why do you look at me like that?" she asked, turning upon him with a little show of temper.

"If your father will allow me to say so, you are the object most worth looking at in the room," answered the young man, calmly.

"You will make her vain with your pretty speeches, Griggs," said Dalrymple.

"I doubt that," answered Griggs.

He relapsed into silence, and drained a big tumbler of wine. Reanda suspected, with a shrewd intuition, that the American admired Gloria, but that she did not like him much.

"Miss Dalrymple is doing her best to make me vain with her praise," said Reanda.

"I never flattered any one in my life," answered Gloria. "Signor Reanda is the greatest painter in Italy. Everybody says so. It would be foolish of me to even pretend that after seeing him at work I had thought of anything else. We have all said, this evening, that the frescoes were wonderful, and that no one, not even Raphael, who did the same thing, has ever had a more beautiful idea of the history of Cupid and Psyche. Why should we not tell the truth, just because he happens to be here? How illogical you are!"

"I believe I excepted Raphael," said Dalrymple, with his national accuracy. "But Signor Reanda will not quarrel with me on that account, I am sure."

"But I did not except Raphael, nor any one," persisted Gloria, before Reanda could speak.

"Really, Signorina, though I am mortal and susceptible, you go a little too far. Flattery is not appreciation, you know."

"It is not flattery," she answered, and the colour rose in her face. "I am quite in earnest. Nobody ever painted anything better than your Cupid and Psyche. Raphael's is dull and uninteresting compared with it."

"I blush, but I cannot accept so much," said the Italian, smiling politely, but still trying to discover whether she meant what she said or not.

In spite of himself, as before, he continued to

believe her, though his judgment told him that hers could not be worth much. But he was pleased to have made such an impression, and by quick degrees his prejudice against her began to disappear. What had seemed like boldness in her no longer shocked him, and he described it to himself as the innocent frankness of a foreign girl. It was not possible that any one so like the dead Maria Braccio could be vulgar or bold. From that moment he began to rank Gloria as belonging to the higher sphere from which his birth excluded him. It was a curious and quick transition, and he would not have admitted that it was due to her exaggerated praise of his work. Strange as it must seem to those not familiar with the almost impassable barriers of old Italian society, Reanda had that evening, for the first time in his life, the sensation of being liked, admired, and talked with by a woman of Francesca Campodonico's class; stranger still, it was one of the most delicious sensations he had ever experienced. Yet the woman in question was but a girl not yet seventeen years old. Before he rose to go home, he unconsciously resented Griggs's silent admiration for Gloria. To the average Italian, such silence is a sign that a man is in love, and Reanda was the more attracted to Gloria because she treated Griggs with such perfect indifference.

It was nearly one o'clock when he lighted his

taper to descend the stairs. Griggs was also ready to go. It was a relief to know that he was not going to stay behind and talk with Gloria. They went down in silence.

"I wanted to ask you a question," said the American, as they came out upon the street, and blew out their tapers. "We live in opposite directions, so I must ask it now. Should you mind, if I wrote an article on your frescoes for a London paper?"

"Mind!" exclaimed the artist, with a sudden revulsion of feeling in favour of the journalist. "I should be delighted — flattered."

"No," said Griggs, coldly. "I shall not write as Miss Dalrymple talks. But I shall try and do you justice, and that is a good deal, when one is a serious artist, as you are."

Reanda was struck by the cool moderation of the words, which expressed his own modest judgment of himself almost too exactly to be agreeable after Gloria's unlimited praise. He thanked Griggs warmly, however, and they shook hands before they parted.

CHAPTER XXII.

THREE months passed, and Reanda was intimate with the Dalrymples. It was natural enough, considering the circumstances. They lived much alone, and Reanda was like them in this respect, for he rarely went where he was obliged to talk. During the day he saw much of Donna Francesca, but when it grew dark in the early afternoons of midwinter, the artist was thrown upon his own resources. In former years he had now and then done as many of the other artists did, and had sometimes for a month or two spent most of his evenings at the eating-house where he dined, in company with half-a-dozen others who frequented the same establishment. Each dropped in, at any hour that chanced to suit him, ate his supper, pushed back his chair, and joined in the general conversation, smoking, and drinking coffee or a little wine, until it was time to go home. There were grey-headed painters who had hardly been absent more than a few days in five and twenty years from their accustomed tables at such places as the Falcone, the Gabbione, or the Genio. But Reanda had never joined in any of these little circles for longer than

a month or two, by which time he had exhausted the stock of his companions' ideas, and returned to solitude and his own thoughts. For he had something which they had not, besides his greater talent, his broader intelligence, and his deeper artistic insight. Donna Francesca's refining influence exerted itself continually upon him, and made much of the common conversation tiresome or disagreeable to him. A man whose existence is penetrated by the presence of a rarely refined woman seldom cares much for the daily society of men. He prefers to be alone, when he cannot be with her.

Reanda believed that what he felt for Francesca was a devoted and almost devout friendship. The fact that before many weeks had passed after his first meeting with Gloria he was perceptibly in love with the girl, while he felt not the smallest change in his relations with Donna Francesca, satisfactorily proved to him that he was right. It would not have been like an Italian and a Latin to compare his feelings for the two women by imaginary tests, as, for instance, by asking himself for which of the two he would make the greater sacrifice. He took it for granted that the one sentiment was friendship and the other love, and he acted accordingly.

He was distrustful, indeed, and very suspicious, but not of himself. Gloria treated him too well. Her eyes told him more than he felt able to be-

lieve. It was not natural that a girl so young and fresh and beautiful, with the world before her, should fall in love with a man of his age. That, at least, was what he thought. But the fact that it was unnatural did not prevent it from taking place.

Reanda ignored certain points of great importance. In the first place, Gloria had not really the world before her. Her little sphere was closely limited by her father's morose selfishness, which led him to keep her in Rome because he liked the place himself, and to keep away from his countrymen, whom he detested as heartily as Britons living abroad sometimes do. On the other hand, a vague dread lest the story of his marriage might some day come to the light kept him away from Roman society. He had fallen back upon artistic Bohemia for such company as he wanted, which was little enough, and as his child grew up he had not understood that she was developing early and coming to womanhood while she was still under the care of the governess he had provided. He had not even made any plans for her future, for he did not love her, though he indulged her as a selfish and easy means of fulfilling his paternal obligations. It was to get rid of her importunity that he began to take her to the houses of some of the married artists when she was only sixteen years old, though she looked at least two years older.

But in such society as that, Reanda was easily first, apart from the talent which placed him at the head of the whole artistic profession. He had been brought up, taught, and educated among gentlemen, sons of one of the oldest and most fastidious aristocracies in Europe, and he had their manners, their speech, their quiet air of superiority, and especially that exterior gentleness and modesty of demeanour which most touches some women. In Gloria's opinion, he even had much of their appearance, being tall, thin, and dark. Accustomed as she was to living with her father, who was gloomy and morose, and to seeing much of Paul Griggs, whose powers of silence were phenomenal at that time, Reanda's easy grace of conversation charmed and flattered her. He was, by many degrees, the superior in talent, in charm, in learning, to any one she had ever met, and it must not be forgotten that although he was twenty years older than she, he was not yet forty, and that, as he had not a grey hair in his head, he could still pass for a young man, though his grave disposition made him feel older than he was. Of the three melancholic men in whose society she chiefly lived, her father was selfish and morose; Griggs was gentle, but silent and incomprehensible, though he exerted an undoubted influence over her; Reanda alone, though naturally melancholy, was at once gentle, companionable, and talkative with her.

Dalrymple accepted the intimacy with indifference and even with a certain satisfaction. In his reflexions, he characterized Reanda as a rare combination of the great artist and the gentleman. Since Gloria had known him she had grown more quiet. She admired him and imitated his manner. It was a good thing. He was glad, too, that Reanda was not married, for it would have been a nuisance, thought Dalrymple, to have the man's wife always about and expecting to be amused.

It began to occur to him that Reanda might be falling in love with Gloria, and he did not resent the idea. In fact, though at first sight it should have seemed strange to an Englishman, he looked upon the idea with favour. He wished to live out his life in Italy, for he had got that fierce affection for the country which has overcome and bound many northern men, from Sir John Hawkwood to Landor and Browning. Though he did not love Gloria, he was attached to her in his own way, and did not wish to lose sight of her altogether. But, in consequence of his own irregular marriage, he could not marry her to a man of his own rank in Rome, who would not fail to make inquiries about her mother. It was most natural that he should look upon such a man as Reanda with favour. Reanda had many good qualities. Dalrymple's judgment was generally keen enough about people, and he had understood that such a woman as Donna

Francesca Campodonico would certainly not make a personal friend of a painter, and allow him to occupy rooms in her palace, unless his character were altogether above suspicion.

Gloria was, of course, too young to be married yet, though she seemed to be so entirely grown up and altogether a woman. In this respect Dalrymple was not prejudiced. His own mother had been married at the age of seventeen, and he had lived long in Italy, where early marriages were common enough. There could certainly be no serious objection to the match on that score, when another year should have passed.

Dalrymple's only anxiety about his daughter concerned her strong inclination to be a public singer. The prejudice was by no means extraordinary, and as a Scotchman, it had even more weight with him than it could have had, for instance, with an Italian. Reanda entirely agreed with him on this point, and when Gloria spoke of it, he never failed to draw a lively picture of the drawbacks attending stage life. The artist spoke very strongly, for one of Gloria's earliest and chiefest attractions in his eyes had been the certainty he felt that she belonged to Francesca's class. For that reason her flattering admiration had brought with it a peculiar savour, especially delightful to the taste of a man of humble origin. Dalrymple did not understand that, but he knew that if Gloria married the

great painter, the latter would effectually keep her from the stage.

As for Griggs, the Scotchman was well aware that the poor young journalist might easily fall in love with the beautiful girl. But this did not deter him at all from having Griggs constantly at the house. Griggs was the only man he had ever met who did not bore him, who could be silent for an hour at a time, who could swallow as much strong wine as he without the slightest apparent effect upon his manner, who understood all he said, though sometimes saying things which he could not understand — in short, Griggs was a necessity to him. The young man was perhaps aware of the fact, and he found Dalrymple congenial to his own temper; but he was as excessively proud as he was extremely poor, at that time, and he managed to refuse the greater part of the hospitality offered to him, simply because he could not return it. It was very rarely that he accepted an invitation to a meal, though he now generally came in the evening, besides meeting Dalrymple almost every morning when they went to the bookseller's together.

He puzzled the Scotchman strangely. He was an odd combination of a thinker and an athlete, half literary man, half gladiator. The common phrase 'an old head on young shoulders' described him as well as any phrase could. The shoulders

were perhaps the more remarkable, but the head was not to be despised. A man who could break a horseshoe and tear in two a pack of cards, and who spent his spare time in studying Hegel and Kant, when he was not writing political correspondence for newspapers, deserved to be considered an exception. He seemed to have no material wants, and yet he had the animal power of enjoying material things even in excess, which is rare. He had a couple of rooms in the Via della Frezza, between the Corso and the Ripetta, where he lived in a rather mysterious way, though he made no secret about it. Occasionally an acquaintance climbed the steep stairs, but no one ever got him to open the door nor to give any sign that he was at home, if he were within. A one-eyed cobbler acted as porter downstairs, from morning till night, astride upon his bench and ever at work, an ill-savoured old pipe in his mouth.

"You may try," he answered, when any one asked for Griggs. "Who knows? Perhaps Sor Paolo will open. Try a little, if you have patience."

Patience being exhausted, the visitor came down the five flights again, and remonstrated with the cobbler.

"I did not say anything," he would reply, in a cloud of smoke. "Many have tried. I told you to try. Am I to tell you that no one has ever got

in? Why? To disoblige you? If you want anything of Sor Paolo, say it to me. Or come again."

"But he will not open," objected the visitor.

"Oh, that is true," returned the man of one eye. "But if you wish to try, I am not here to hinder you. This is the truth."

Now and then, some one more inquisitive suggested that there might be a lady in the question. The one eye then fixed itself in a vacant stare.

"Females?" the cobbler would exclaim. "Not even cats. What passes through your head? He is alone always. If you do not believe me, you can try. I do not say Sor Paolo will not open the door. A door is a door, to be opened."

"But since I have tried!"

"And I, what can I do? You have come, you have seen, you have knocked, and no one has opened. May the Madonna accompany you! I can do nothing."

So even the most importunate of visitors departed at last. But Griggs had taken Dalrymple up to his lodgings more than once, and they had sat there for an hour talking over books. Dalrymple observed, indeed, that Griggs was more inclined to talk in his own rooms than anywhere else, and that his manner then changed so much as to make him almost seem to be a different man. There was a look of interest in the stony mask, and there was a light in the deep-set eyes which neither wine

nor wit could bring there at other times. The man wore his armour against the world, as it were, a tough shell made up of a poor man's pride, and solid with that sense of absolute physical superiority which is an element in the character of strong men, and which the Scotchman understood. He himself had been of the strong, but not always the strongest. Paul Griggs had never yet been matched by any man since he had first got his growth. He was the equal of many in intellect, but his bodily strength was not equalled by any in his youth and manhood. The secret of his one well-hidden vanity lay in that. His moral power showed itself in his assumed modesty about it, for it was almost impossible to prevail upon him to make exhibition of it. Gloria alone seemed able to induce him, for her especial amusement, to break a silver dollar with his fingers, or tear a pack of cards, and then only in the presence of her father or Reanda, but never before other people.

"You are the strongest man in the world, are you not?" she asked him once.

"Yes," he answered. "I probably am, if it is I. I am vain of it, but not proud of it. That makes me think sometimes that I am two men in one. That might account for it, you know."

"What nonsense!" Gloria laughed.

"Is it? I daresay it is." And he relapsed into indifference, so far as she could see.

"What is the other man like?" she asked. "Not the strong man of the two, but the other?"

"He is a good man. The strong man is bad. They fight, and the result is insignificance. Some day one of the two will get the better of the other."

"What will happen then?" she asked lightly, and still inclined to laugh.

"One or the other, or both, will die, I suppose," he answered.

"How very unpleasant!"

She did not at all understand what he meant. At the same time she could not help feeling that he was eminently a man to whom she would turn in danger or trouble. Girl though she was, she could not mistake his great admiration of her, and by degrees, as the winter wore on, she trusted him more, though he still repelled her a little, for his saturnine calm was opposed to her violent vitality, as a black rock to a tawny torrent. Griggs had neither the manner nor the temper which wins women's hearts as a rule. Such men are sometimes loved by women when their sorrow has chained them to the rock of horror, and grief insatiable tears out their broken hearts. But in their strength they are not loved. They cannot give themselves yet, for their strength hinders them, and women think them miserly of words and of love's little coin of change. If they get love at

last, it is as the pity which the unhurt weak feel for the ruined strong.

Gloria was not above irritating Griggs occasionally, when the fancy took her to seek amusement in that way. She knew how to do it, and he rarely turned upon her, even in the most gentle way.

"We are good friends, are we not?" she asked one day, when it was raining and he was alone with her, waiting for her father to come in.

"I hope so," he answered, turning his impassive face slowly towards her.

"Then you ought to be much nicer to me," she said.

"I am as nice as I know how to be," replied Griggs, with fixed eyes. "What shall I do?"

"That is it. You ought to know. You could talk and say pleasant things, for instance. Don't you admit that you are very dull to-day?"

"I admit it. I regret it, and I wish I were not."

"You need not be. I am sure you can talk very well, when you please. You are not exactly funny at any time, but to-day you are funereal. You remind me of those big black horses they use for hearses, you know."

"Thank you, thank you," said Griggs, quietly, repeating the words without emphasis.

"I don't like you!" she exclaimed petulantly, but with a little laugh.

"I know that," he answered. "But I like you very much. We were probably meant to differ."

"Then you might amuse me. It's awfully dull when it rains. Pull the house down, or tear up silver scudi, or something."

"I am not Samson, and I am not a clown," observed Griggs, coldly.

"I shall never like you if you are so disagreeable," said Gloria, taking up a book, and settling herself to read.

"I am afraid you never will," answered Griggs, following her example.

A few minutes passed in silence. Then Gloria looked up suddenly.

"Mr. Griggs?"

"Yes?"

"I did not mean to be horrid."

"No, of course not."

"Because, if I were ever in trouble, you know — I should come straight to you."

"Thank you," he answered very gently. "But I hope you will never be in trouble. If you ever should be —" He stopped.

"Well?"

"I do not think you would find anybody who would try harder to help you," he said simply.

She wished that his voice would tremble, or that he would put out his hand towards her, or show something a little more like emotion. But she had to be satisfied.

"Would it be the good man or the bad man that

would help me?" she asked, remembering the former conversation.

"Both," answered Griggs, without hesitation.

"I am not sure that I might not like the bad man better," said Gloria, almost to herself.

"Is Reanda a bad man?" inquired Griggs, slowly, and looking for the blush in her face.

"Why?" But she blushed, as he expected.

"Because you like him better than me."

"You are quite different. It is of no use to talk about it, and I want to read."

She turned from him and buried herself in her book, but she moved restlessly two or three times, and it was some minutes before the heightened colour disappeared from her face.

She was very girlish still, and when she had irritated Griggs as far as such a man was capable of irritation, she preferred to refuse battle rather than deal with the difficulty she had created. But Griggs understood, and amongst his still small sufferings he often felt the little, dull, hopeless pang which tells a man that he is unlovable.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Very late, one night in the Carnival season, Paul Griggs was walking the streets alone. His sufferings were no longer so small as they had been, and the bitterness of solitude was congenial to him.

He had been at the house of a Spanish artist, where there had been dancing and music and supper and improvised tableaux. Gloria and her father and Reanda had all been there, too, and something had happened which had stirred the depths of the young man's slow temper. He hated to make an exhibition of himself, and much against his will he had been exhibited, as it were, to help the gaiety of the entertainment. Cotogni, the great sculptor, had suggested that Griggs should appear as Samson, asleep with his head on Delilah's knee, and bound by her with cords which he should seem to break as the Philistines rushed in. He had refused flatly, again and again, till all the noisy party caught the idea and forced him to it.

They had dressed him in silk draperies, his mighty arms bare almost to the shoulder, and they had given him a long, dark, theatrical wig. They

had bound his arms and chest with cords, and had made him lie down and pretend to be asleep at the feet of the artist's beautiful wife. They had made slipping knots in the cords, so that he could easily wrench them loose. Then the curtain had been drawn aside, and there had been a pause as the tableau was shown. All at once a mob of artists, draped hastily in anything they could lay their hands upon, and with all manner of helmets on their heads from the Spaniard's collection, had rushed in.

"The Philistines are upon thee!" cried Delilah in a piercing voice.

He sprang to his feet, his legs being free, and he struggled with the cords. The knots would not slip as they were meant to do. The situation lasted several seconds, and was ridiculous enough.

People began to laugh.

"Cut off his hair!" cried one.

"Of what use was the wig?" laughed another, and every one tittered.

Griggs could hear Gloria's clear, high laugh above the rest. His blood slowly rose in his throat. But no one pulled the curtain across. The Philistines, young artists, mad with Carnival, improvised a very eccentric dance of triumph, and the laughter increased.

Griggs looked at the cords. Then his mask-like face turned slowly to the audience. Only the great

veins swelled suddenly at his temples, while every one watched him in the general amusement. Suddenly his eyes flashed, and he drew a deep breath, for he was angry. In an instant there was dead silence in the room. A moment later one of the cords, drawn tight round his chest, over the silk robe, snapped like a thread, then another, and then a third. Then in a sort of frenzy of anger he savagely broke the whole cord into pieces with his hands, tossing the bits contemptuously upon the floor. His face was as white as a dead man's.

A roar of applause broke the silence when the guests realized what he had done. The artists seized him and carried him high in procession round the room, the women threw flowers at him, and some one struck up a triumphal march on the piano. It was an ovation. Half an hour later, dressed again in his ordinary clothes, he found himself next to Gloria.

"You told me the other day that you were not Samson," she said. "You see you can be when you choose."

"No," answered Griggs, coldly; "I am a clown."

What she had said was natural enough, but somehow the satisfaction of his bodily vanity had stung his moral pride beyond endurance. It seemed a despicable thing to be as vain as he was of a gift for which he had not paid any price. Deep down, too, he felt bitterly that he had never received the

slightest praise for any thought of his which he had written down and sent to that cauldron of the English daily press in which all individual right to distinction disappears, with all claim to praise, from written matter, however good it be. He worked, he read, he studied, he wrote late, and rose early to observe. But his natural gift was to be a mountebank, a clown, a circus Hercules. By stiffening one of his senseless arms he could bring down roars of applause. By years of bitter labour with his pen he earned the barest living. The muscles that a porter might have, offered him opulence, because it was tougher by a few degrees than the flesh of other men. The knowledge he had striven for just kept him above absolute want.

He slipped away from the gay party as soon as he could. His last glance round the room showed him Angelo Reanda and Gloria, sitting in a corner apart. The girl's face was grave. There was a gentle and happy light in the artist's eyes which Griggs had never seen. That also was the strong man's portion.

Wrathfully he strode away from the house, under the dim oil lamps, an unlighted cigar between his teeth, his soft felt hat drawn over his eyes. He crossed the city towards the Pantheon and the Piazza Navona, his cigar still unlighted.

The streets were alive, though it was very late. There was more freedom to be gay and more hope

of being simply happy in those days. Many men and women wandered about in bands of ten or a dozen, singing in soft voices, above which now and then rose a few ringing tenor notes. There was laughter everywhere in the air; tambourines drummed and thumped and jingled, guitars twanged, and mandolines tinkled and quavered. From a dark lane somewhere off the broader thoroughfare, a single voice sang out in serenade. The Corso was bright with unusual lights, and strewn with the birdseed and plaster-of-Paris 'confetti,' with yellow sand and sprigs of box leaves, and withering flowers, and there was about all the neighbourhood that peculiar smell of plaster and crushed flower-stalks which belonged then to the street carnival of Rome. Further on, in the dim quarters by the Tiber, the wine shops were all crowded, and men stood and drank outside on the pavement, and paid, and went laughing on, laughing and singing, singing and laughing, through the night.

Griggs felt the penetrating loneliness of him who cannot laugh amidst laughter, and it was congenial to him. He had always been alone, and he felt that the world held no companion for him. There was satisfaction in knowing that no one could ever guess what went on between his heart and his head.

He wandered on with the same even, untiring stride, for a long time, through the dark and wind-

ing ways, from the Pantheon through the old city, through Piazza Paganica and Costaguti to Piazza Montanara, where the carters and carriers congregate from the country. There, in the middle of the three-cornered open space, a flag in the paving marked the spot on which men used to be put to death. To-night even the carriers were making merry. Griggs was thirsty, and paused at the door of a wine shop. Though it was winter, men were sitting outside, for there was no more room within. A flaring torch of pitched rope was stuck in an iron ring, and shed an uncertain, smoky light upon the men's faces. A drawer in an apron brought Griggs a glass, and he drank standing.

"It makes no difference," said a rough voice in the little crowd. "They may cut off my head there on the paving-stone. They would do me a favour. If I find him, I kill him. An evil death on him and all his house!"

Griggs looked at the speaker without surprise, for he had often heard such things said. He saw an iron-grey man in good peasant's clothes of dark blue with broad silver buttons, a man with a true Roman face, a small aquiline nose, and keen, dark eyes. He turned away, and began to retrace his steps.

In half an hour he was at the door of the old Falcone inn, gone now like many relics of that day. It stood in the Piazza of Saint Eustace near

the Pantheon, and in its time was the best of the old-fashioned eating-houses. Griggs felt suddenly hungry. He had walked seven or eight miles since he had left the party. He entered, and passed through the crowded rooms below and up the narrow steps to a small upper chamber, where he hoped to be alone. But there, also, every seat was taken.

To his surprise Dalrymple and Reanda were at the table furthest from him, in earnest conversation, with a measure of wine between them. Griggs had never seen the Italian there before, but the latter caught sight of him as he stood in the door, and rose to his feet, making a sign which meant that he was going away, and that the chair was vacant. Griggs came forward, and looked into his face as they met. There was the same gentle and happy light in Reanda's eyes which had been there when he was sitting with Gloria in the corner of the Spanish artist's drawing-room. Then Griggs understood and knew the truth, and guessed the meaning of the unaccustomed pressure of the hand as Reanda greeted him without speaking, and hurriedly went out.

Dalrymple had seen Griggs coming and was already calling to a man in a spotless white jacket for another glass and more wine. The Scotchman's bony face was haggard, but there was a little colour in his cheeks, and he seemed pleased.

"Sit down, Griggs," he said. "There are no more chairs, so we can keep the table to ourselves. I hope you are half as thirsty as I am."

"Rather more than half," answered the other, and he drank eagerly. "Give me some more, please," he said, holding out his glass.

"I see that you are in the right humour to hear good news," said the Scot. "Reanda is to marry my daughter in the summer."

"I congratulate you all three," said Griggs, slowly, for he had known what was coming. "Let us drink the health of the couple."

"By all means," answered Dalrymple, filling again. "By all means let us drink. I could not swallow that sweet stuff at Mendoza's. This is better. By all means let us drink as much as we can."

"That might mean a good deal," said Griggs, quickly, and he drained a third glass. "Were you ever drunk, Dalrymple?" he inquired gravely.

"No. I never was," answered the Scotchman.

"Nor I. This seems a fitting occasion for trying an experiment. We might try to get drunk."

"By all means, let us try," replied Dalrymple. "I have my doubts about the possibility of the thing, however."

"So have I."

They sat opposite to one another in silence for some minutes, each satisfied that the other was in

earnest. Dalrymple solemnly filled the glasses and then leaned back in his chair.

"You did not seem much surprised by what I told you," he observed at last. "I suppose you expected it."

"Yes. It seemed natural enough, though it is not always the natural things that happen."

"I think they are suited to marry. Of course, Reanda is very much older, but he is comparatively a young man still."

"Comparatively. He will make a better husband for having had experience, I daresay."

"That depends on what experience he has had. When I first saw him I thought he was in love with Donna Francesca. It would have been like an artist. They are mostly fools. But I was mistaken. He worships at a distance."

"And she preserves the distance," Griggs remarked. "You are not drinking fair. My glass is empty."

Dalrymple finished his and refilled both.

"I have been here some time," he observed, half apologetically. "But as I was saying — or rather, as you were saying — Donna Francesca preserves the distance. These Italians do that admirably. They know the difference between intimacy and familiarity."

"That is a nice distinction," said Griggs. "I will use it in my next letter. No. Donna Fran-

cesca could never be familiar with any one. They learn it when they are young, I suppose, and it becomes a race-characteristic."

"What?" asked Dalrymple, abruptly.

"A certain graceful loftiness," answered the younger man.

The Scotchman's wrinkled eyelids contracted, and he was silent for a few moments.

"A certain graceful loftiness," he repeated slowly. "Yes, perhaps so. A certain graceful loftiness."

"You seem struck by the expression," said Griggs.

"I am. Drink, man, drink!" added Dalrymple, suddenly, in a different tone. "There's no time to be lost if we mean to drink enough to hurt us before those beggars go to bed."

"Never fear. They will be up all night. Not that it is a reason for wasting time, as you say."

He drank his glass and watched Dalrymple as the latter did likewise, with that deliberate intention which few but Scotchmen can maintain on such occasions. The wine might have been poured into a quicksand, for any effect it had as yet produced.

"Those race-characteristics of families are very curious," continued Griggs, thoughtfully.

"Are they?" Dalrymple looked at him suspiciously.

"Very. Especially voices. They run in families, like resemblance of features."

"So they do," answered the other, thoughtfully. "So they do."

He had of late years got into the habit of often repeating such short phrases, in an absent-minded way.

"Yes," said Griggs. "I noticed Donna Francesca's voice, the first time I ever heard it. It is one of those voices which must be inherited. I am sure that all her family have spoken as she does. It reminds me of something — of some one —"

Dalrymple raised his eyes suddenly again, as though he were irritated.

"I say," he began, interrupting his companion. "Do you feel anything? Anything queer in your head?"

"No. Why?"

"You are talking rather disconnectedly, that is all."

"Am I? It did not strike me that I was incoherent. Probably one half of me was asleep while the other was talking." He laughed drily, and drank again. "No," he said thoughtfully, as he set down his glass. "I feel nothing unusual in my head. It would be odd if I did, considering that we have only just begun."

"So I thought," answered Dalrymple.

He ordered more wine and relapsed into silence. Neither spoke again for a long time.

"There goes another bottle," said Dalrymple, at last, as he drained the last drops from the flagon measure. "Drink a little faster. This is slow work. We know the old road well enough."

"You are not inclined to give up the attempt, are you?" inquired Griggs, whose still face showed no change. "Is it fair to eat? I am hungry."

"Certainly. Eat as much as you like."

Griggs ordered something, which was brought after considerable delay, and he began to eat.

"We are not loquacious over our cups," remarked Dalrymple. "Should you mind telling me why you are anxious to get drunk to-night for the first time in your life?"

"I might ask you the same question," answered Griggs, cautiously.

"Merely because you proposed it. It struck me as a perfectly new idea. I have not much to amuse me, you know, and I shall have less when my daughter leaves me. It would be an amusement to lose one's head in some way."

"In such a way as to be able to get it back, you mean. I was walking this evening after the party, and I came to the Piazza Montanara. There is a big flagstone there on which people used to leave their heads for good."

"Yes. I have seen it. You cannot tell me much about Rome which I do not know."

"There were a lot of carriers drinking close by. It was rather grim, I thought. An old fellow there had a spite against somebody. You know how they talk. 'They may cut off my head there on the paving-stone,' the man said. 'If I find him, I kill him. An evil death on him and all his house!' You have heard that sort of thing. But the fellow seemed to be very much in earnest."

"He will probably kill his man," said Dalrymple.

Suddenly his big, loose shoulders shook a little, and he shivered. He glanced towards the window, suspecting that it might be open.

"Are you cold?" asked Griggs, carelessly.

"Cold? No. Some one was walking over my grave, as they say. If we varied the entertainment with something stronger, we should get on faster, though."

"No," said Griggs. "I refuse to mix things. This may be the longer way, but it is the safer."

And he drank again.

"He was a man from Tivoli, or Subiaco," he remarked presently. "He spoke with that accent."

"I daresay," answered Dalrymple, who looked down into his glass at that moment, so that his face was in shadow.

Just then four men who had occupied a table

near the door rose and went out. It was late, even for a night in Carnival.

"I hope they are not going to leave us all to ourselves," said Dalrymple. "The place will be shut up, and we need at least two hours more."

"At least," assented Paul Griggs. "But they expect to be open all night. I think there is time."

The men at the other tables showed no signs of moving. They sat quietly in their places, drinking steadily, by sips. Some of them were eating roasted chestnuts, and all were talking more or less in low tones. Occasionally one voice or another rose above the rest in an exclamation, but instantly subsided again. Italians of that class are rarely noisy, for though the Romans drink deep, they generally have strong heads, and would be ashamed of growing excited over their wine.

The air was heavy, for several men were smoking strong cigars. The vaulted chamber was lighted by a single large oil lamp with a reflector, hung by a cord from the intersection of the cross-arches. The floor was of glazed white tiles, and the single window had curtains of Turkey red. It was all very clean and respectable and well kept, even at that crowded season, but the air was heavy with wine and tobacco, and the smell of cooked food, — a peculiar atmosphere in which the old-fashioned Roman delighted to sit for hours on holidays.

Dalrymple looked about him, moving his pale blue eyes without turning his head. The colour had deepened a little on his prominent cheek bones, and his eyes were less bright than usual. But his red hair, growing sandy with grey, was brushed smoothly back, and his evening dress was unruffled. He and Griggs were so evidently gentlemen, that some of the Italians at the other tables glanced at them occasionally in quiet surprise, not that they should be there, but that they should remain so long, and so constantly renew their order for another bottle of wine.

Giulio, the stout, dark drawer in a spotless jacket, moved about silently and quickly. One of the Italians glanced at Griggs and Dalrymple and then at the waiter, who also glanced at them quickly and then shrugged his shoulders almost perceptibly. Dalrymple saw both glances, and his eyes lighted up.

"I believe that fellow is laughing at us," he said to Griggs.

"There is nothing to laugh at," answered the latter, unmoved. "But of course, if you think so, throw him downstairs."

Dalrymple laughed drily.

"There is a certain calmness about the suggestion," he said. "It has a good, old-fashioned ring to it. You are not a very civilized young man, considering your intellectual attainments."

"I grew up at sea and before the mast. That may account for it."

"You seem to have crammed a good deal into a short life," observed Dalrymple. "It must have been a classic ship, where they taught Greek and Latin."

"The captain used to call her his Ship of Fools. As a matter of fact, it was rather classic, as you say. The old man taught us navigation and Greek verse by turns for five years. He was a university man with a passion for literature, but I never knew a better sailor. He put me ashore when I was seventeen with pretty nearly the whole of my five years' pay in my pocket, and he made me promise that I would go to college and stay as long as my money held out. I got through somehow, but I am not sure that I bless him. He is afloat still, and I write to him now and then."

"An Englishman, I suppose?"

"No. An American."

"What strange people you Americans are!" exclaimed Dalrymple, and he drank again. "You take up a profession, and you wear it for a bit, like a coat, and then change it for another," he added, setting down his empty glass.

"Very much like you Scotch," answered Griggs. "I have heard you say that you were a doctor once."

"A doctor — yes — in a way, for the sake of be-

ing a man of science, or believing myself to be one. My family was opposed to it," he continued thoughtfully. "My father told me it was his sincere belief that science did not stand in need of any help from me. He said I was more likely to need the help of science, like other lunatics. I will not say that he was not right."

He laughed a little and filled his glass.

"Poor Dalrymple!" he exclaimed softly, still smiling.

Paul Griggs raised his slow eyes to his companion's face.

"It never struck me that you were much to be pitied," he observed.

"No, no. Perhaps not. But I will venture to say that the point is debatable, and could be argued. 'To be, or not to be' is a question admirably calculated to draw out the resources of the intellect in argument, if you are inclined for that sort of diversion. It is a very good thing, a very good thing for a man to consider and weigh that question while he is young. Before he goes to sleep, you know, Griggs, before he goes to sleep."

"'For in that sleep of death, what dreams may come—'" Griggs quoted, and stopped.

"'When we have shuffled off this mortal coil.' You do not know your Shakespeare, young man."

"'Must give us pause,'" continued Griggs. "I was thinking of the dreams, not of the rest."

"Dreams? Yes. There will be dreams there. Dreams, and other things — 'this ae night of all.' Not that my reason admits that they can be more than dreams, you know, Griggs. Reason says 'to sleep — no more.' And fancy says 'perchance to dream.' Well, well, it will be a long dream, that's all."

"Yes. We shall be dead a long time. Better drink now." And Griggs drank.

"'Fire and sleet and candle-light,
And Christ receive thy soul;'"

said Dalrymple, with a far-away look in his pale eyes. "Do you know the Lyke-Wake Dirge, Griggs? It is a grand dirge. Hark to the swing of it.

'This ae night, this ae night,
Every night and all,
Fire and sleet and candle-light,
And Christ receive thy soul.'"

He repeated the strange words in a dull, matter-of-fact way, with a Scotch accent rarely perceptible in his conversation. Griggs listened. He had heard the dirge before, with all its many stanzas, and it had always had an odd fascination for him. He said nothing.

"It bodes no good to be singing a dirge at a betrothal," said the Scotchman, suddenly. "Drink, man, drink! Drink till the blue devils fly away. Drink —

'Till a' the seas gang dry, my love,
Till a' the seas gang dry.'

Not that it is in the disposition of the Italian inn-keeper to give us time for that," he added drily. "As I was saying, I am of a melancholic temper. Not that I take you for a gay man yourself, Griggs. Drink a little more. It is my opinion that a little more will produce an agreeable impression upon you, my young friend. Drink a little more. You are too grave for so very young a man. I should not wish to be indiscreet, but I might almost take you for a man in love, if I did not know you better. Were you ever in love, Griggs?"

"Yes," answered Griggs, quietly. "And you, Dalrymple? Were you never in love?"

Dalrymple's loosely hung shoulders started suddenly, and his pale blue eyes set themselves steadily to look at Griggs. The red brows were shaggy, and there was a bright red spot on each cheek bone. He did not answer his companion's question, though his lips moved once or twice as though he were about to speak. They seemed unable to form words, and no sound came from them.

His anger was near, perhaps, and with another man it might have broken out. But the pale and stony face opposite him, and the deep, still eyes, exercised a quieting influence, and whatever words rose to his lips were never spoken. Griggs understood that he had touched the dead body of a great passion, sacred in its death as it must have been overwhelming in its life. He struck another sub-

ject immediately, and pretended not to have noticed Dalrymple's expression.

"I like your queer old Scotch ballads," he said, humouring the man's previous tendency to quote poetry.

"There's a lot of life in them still," answered Dalrymple, absently twisting his empty glass.

Griggs filled it for him, and they both drank. Little by little the Italians had begun to go away. Giulio, the fat, white-jacketed drawer, sat nodding in a corner, and the light from the high lamp gleamed on his smooth black hair as his head fell forward.

"There is a sincere vitality in our Scotch poets," said Dalrymple, as though not satisfied with the short answer he had given. "There is a very notable power of active living exhibited in their somewhat irregular versification, and in the concatenation of their ratiocinations regarding the three principal actions of the early Scottish life, which I take to have been birth, stealing, and a violent death."

"'But of these three charity is the greatest,'" observed Griggs, with something like a laugh, for he saw that Dalrymple was beginning to make long sentences, which is a bad sign for a Scotchman's sobriety.

"No," answered Dalrymple, with much gravity. "There I venture — indeed, I claim the right — to

differ with you. For the Scotchman is hospitable, but not charitable. The process of the Scotch mind is unitary, if you will allow me to coin a word for which I will pay with my glass."

And he forthwith fulfilled the obligation in a deep draught. Setting down the tumbler, he leaned back in his chair and looked slowly round the room. His lips moved. Griggs could just distinguish the last lines of another old ballad.

> "'Night and day on me she cries,
> And I am weary of the skies
> Since—'"

He broke off and shook himself nervously, and looked at Griggs, as though wondering whether the latter had heard.

"This wine is good," he said, rousing himself. "Let us have some more. Giulio!"

The fat waiter awoke instantly at the call, looked, nodded, went out, and returned immediately with another bottle.

"Is this the sixth or the seventh?" asked Dalrymple, slowly.

"Eight with Signor Reanda's," answered the man. "But Signor Reanda paid for his as he went out. You have therefore seven. It might be enough." Giulio smiled.

"Bring seven more, Giulio," said the Scotchman, gravely. "It will save you six journeys."

"Does the Signore speak in earnest?" asked the servant, and he glanced at Griggs, who was impassive as marble.

"You flatter yourself," said Dalrymple, impressively, to the man, "if you imagine that I would make even a bad joke to amuse you. Bring seven bottles." Giulio departed.

"That is a Homeric order," observed Griggs.

"I think — in fact, I am almost sure — that seven bottles more will produce an impression upon one of us. But I have a decidedly melancholic disposition, and I accustomed myself to Italian wine when I was very young. Melancholy people can drink more than others. Besides, what does such a bottle hold? I will show you. A tumbler to you, and one to me. Drink; you shall see."

He emptied his glass and poured the remainder of the bottle into it.

"Do you see? Half a tumbler. Two and a half are a bottle. Seven bottles are seventeen and a half glasses. What is that for you or me in a long evening? My blue devils are large. It would take an ocean to float them all. I insist upon going to bed in a good humour to-night, for once, in honour of my daughter's engagement. By the bye, Griggs, what do you think of Reanda?"

"He is a first-rate artist. I like him very well."

"A good man, eh? Well, well — from the point of view of discretion, Griggs, I am doing right.

But then, as you may very wisely object, discretion is only a point of view. The important thing is the view, and not the point. Here comes Ganymede with the seven vials of wrath! Put them on the table, Giulio," he said, as the fat waiter came noiselessly up, carrying the bottles by the necks between his fingers, three in one hand and four in the other. "They make a fine show, all together," he observed thoughtfully, with his bony head a little on one side.

"And may God bless you!" said Giulio, solemnly. "If you do not die to-night, you will never die again."

"I regard it as improbable that we shall die more than once," answered Dalrymple. "I believe," he said, turning to Griggs, "that when men are drunk they make mistakes about money. We will pay now, while we are sober."

Griggs insisted on paying his share. They settled, and Giulio went away happy.

The two strong men sat opposite to each other, under the high lamp in the small room, drinking on and on. There was something terrifying in the Scotchman's determination to lose his senses — something grimly horrible in the younger man's marble impassiveness, as he swallowed glass for glass in time with his companion. His face grew paler still, and colder, but there was a far-off gleaming in the shadowy eyes, like the glimmer of

a light over a lonely plain through the dark. Dalrymple's spirits did not rise, but he talked more and more, and his sentences became long and involved, and sometimes had no conclusion. The wine was telling on him at last. He had never been so strong as Griggs, at his best, and he was no match for him now. The younger man's strangely dual nature seemed to place his head beyond anything which could affect his senses.

Dalrymple talked on and on, rambling from one subject to another, and not waiting for any answer when he asked a question. He quoted long ballads and long passages from Shakespeare, and then turned suddenly off upon a scientific subject, until some word of his own suggested another quotation.

Griggs sat quietly in his seat, drinking as steadily, but paying little attention now to what the Scotchman said. Something had got hold of his heart, and was grinding it like grain between the millstones, grinding it to dust and ashes. He knew that he could not sleep that night. He might as well drink, for it could not hurt him. Nothing material had power to hurt him, it seemed. He felt the pain of longing for the utterly unattainable, knowing that it was beyond him forever. The widowhood of the unsatisfied is hell, compared with the bereavement of complete possession. He had not so much as told Gloria that he had loved her. How could he, being but one degree above

a beggar? The unspoken words burned furrows in his heart, as molten metal scores smoking channels in living flesh. Gloria would laugh, if she knew. The torture made his face white. There was the scorn of himself with it, because a mere child could hurt him almost to death, and that made it worse. A mere child, barely out of the schoolroom, petulant, spoiled, selfish!

But she had the glory of heaven in her voice, and in her face the fatal beauty of her dead mother's deadly sin. He need not have despised himself for loving her. Her whole being appealed to that in man to which no woman ever appealed in vain since the first Adam sold heaven to Satan for woman's love.

Dalrymple, leaning on his elbow, one hand in his streaked beard, the other grasping his glass, talked on and quoted more and more.

> "'The flame took fast upon her cheek,
> Took fast upon her chin,
> Took fast upon her fair body
> Because of her deadly sin.'"

His voice dropped to a hoarse whisper at the last words, and suddenly, regardless of his companion, his hand covered his eyes, and his long fingers strained desperately on his bony forehead. Griggs watched him, thinking that he was drunk at last.

"Because of her deadly sin," he repeated slowly, and the tone changed. "There is no sin in it!" he cried suddenly, in a low voice, that had a distant, ghostly ring in it.

He looked up, and his eyes were changed, and Griggs knew that they no longer saw him.

"Stiff," he said softly. "Quite stiff. Dead two or three hours, I daresay. It stands up on its feet beside me — certainly dead two or three hours."

He nodded wisely to himself twice, and then spoke again in the same far-off tone, gazing past Griggs, at the wall.

"The clothes-basket is a silly idea. Besides, I should lose the night. Rather carry it myself — wrap it up in the plaid. She'll never know, when she has it on her head. Who cares?"

A long silence followed. One hand grasped the empty glass. The other lay motionless on the table. The blue eyes, with widely dilated pupils, stared at the wall, never blinking nor turning. But in the face there was the drawn expression of a bodily effort. Presently Griggs saw the fine beads of perspiration on the great forehead. Then the voice spoke again, but in Italian this time.

"You had better look away while I go by. It is not a pretty sight. No," he continued, changing to English, "not at all a pretty sight. Stiff as a board still."

The unwinking eyes dilated. The bright colour was gone from the cheek bones.

"It burns very well," he said again in Italian. The whole face quivered and the hard lips softened and kissed the air. "It is golden — I can see it in the dark — but I must cover it, darling. Quick — this way. At last! No — you cannot see the fire, but it is burning well, I am sure. Hold on! Hold the pommel of the saddle with both hands — so!"

The voice ceased. Griggs began to understand. He touched Dalrymple's sleeve, leaning across the table.

"I say!" he called softly. "Dalrymple!"

The Scotchman started violently, and the pupils of his eyes contracted. The empty glass in his right hand rattled on the hard wood. Then he smiled vaguely at Griggs.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed in his natural voice. "I think I must have been napping — 'Sleep'ry Sim of the Lamb-hill, and snoring Jock of Suport-mill!' By Jove, Griggs, we have got near the point at last. One bottle left, eh? The seventh.

> "'Then up and gat the seventh o' them,
> And never a word spake he;
> But he has striped his bright brown brand —'

The rest has no bearing upon the subject," he concluded, filling both glasses. "Griggs," he said, before he drank, "I am afraid this settles the matter."

"I am afraid it does," said Griggs.

"Yes. I had hopes a little while ago, which appeared well founded. But that unfortunate little nap has sent me back to the starting-point. I should have to begin all over again. It is very late, I fancy. Let us drink this last glass to our own two selves, and then give it up."

Something had certainly sobered the Scotchman again, or at least cleared his head, for he had not been drunk in the ordinary sense of the word.

"It cannot be said that we have not given the thing a fair trial," said Griggs, gloomily. "I shall certainly not take the trouble to try it again."

Nevertheless he looked at his companion curiously, as they both rose to their feet together. Dalrymple doubled his long arms as he stood up and stretched them out.

"It is curious," he said. "I feel as though I had been carrying a heavy weight in my arms. I did once, for some distance," he added thoughtfully, "and I remember the sensation."

"Very odd," said Griggs, lighting a cigar.

Giulio, sitting outside, half asleep, woke up as he heard the steady tread of the two strong men go by.

"If you do not die to-night, you will never die again!" he said, half aloud, as he rose to go in and clear the room where the guests had been sitting.

END OF VOL. I.

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